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Adventure

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November 1st

Distinctive Stories By

T. S. STRIBLING • W. C. TUTTLE • THOMSON BURTIS

WM. MacLEOD RAINE • STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY • WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

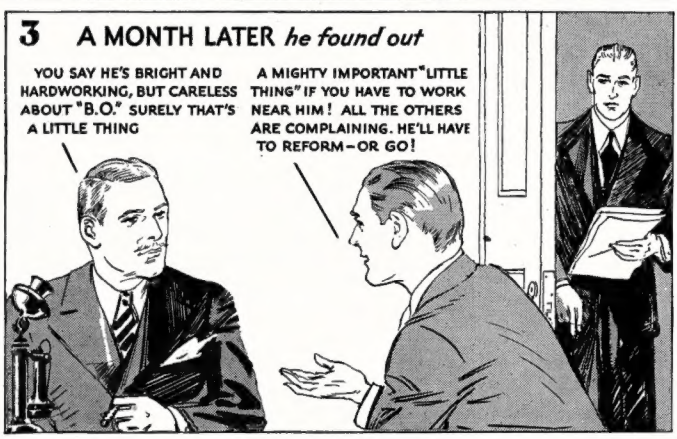
THE MAN WHO COULDN'T KEEP A JOB — *by Timmins*

1

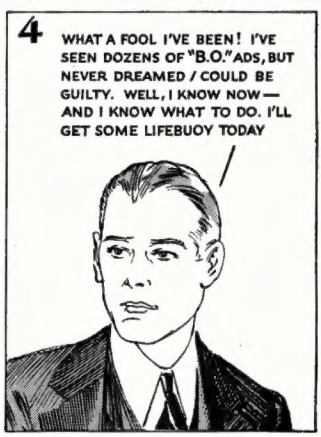
WELL, I START MY NEW JOB TOMORROW. LET'S HOPE *THIS* ONE LASTS! I'M TIRED OF HAVING TO CHANGE SO OFTEN—NEVER GETS YOU ANYWHERE
OH, I *WANT* YOU TO MAKE GOOD! BUT DO BE CAREFUL ABOUT LITTLE THINGS

2

3 A MONTH LATER *he found out*


YOU SAY HE'S BRIGHT AND HARDWORKING, BUT CARELESS ABOUT "B.O." SURELY THAT'S A LITTLE THING
A MIGHTY IMPORTANT "LITTLE THING" IF YOU HAVE TO WORK NEAR HIM! ALL THE OTHERS ARE COMPLAINING. HE'LL HAVE TO REFORM—OR GO!

4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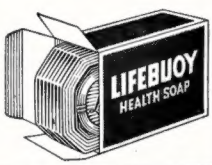

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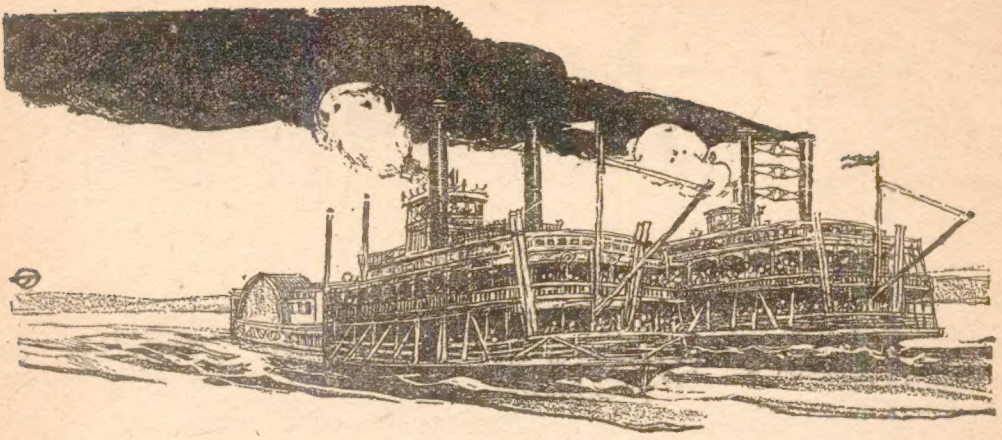


The SOFTENING INFLUENCE

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

EVERYBODY agreed that sooner or later they'd have to have it out. The mystery was why one of them had not killed the other long ago.

They came from Plaquemines Parish. A big place, but probably not big enough to hold both of them for very long. But Alfred d'Aurevilley was still a young man when his family sent him up to New Orleans to study law; and soon afterward, J. Haroldson Marcus took to politics and spent most of his time in Baton Rouge. Later, Senator Marcus, whose financial affairs were not of the healthiest, moved still farther north; he became associated in some manner with a steamboat company on the upper river, and lived chiefly in Cairo or Cincinnati. He never would admit that he was definitely in business.

"And he isn't, either," Judge d'Aurevilley would snort. "At least, I've always understood that gambling was considered a profession, not a business. But then," the Judge would finish, "his mother was a Chilcote, and I suppose it's no more than you could expect."

The Judge firmly believed that. Indeed, he said it to Senator Marcus's face once, on an Ohio River boat. The Judge had been visiting Yankee kin in Cincinnati. Returning, he happened into the barroom for a sherry cobbler, and saw Senator Marcus for the first time in many years. Without any hesitation, without even pausing to order the cobbler, he addressed the poker game in which the Senator was participating.

"You gentlemen will forgive me for intruding, but I feel it's my duty to warn you that this man—" and he pointed to the Senator—"is a common gambler, a professional gambler, gentlemen, and very likely—I won't say of my own knowledge, for I never stooped to play with him—but very likely a common cheat as well."

Senator Marcus sprang to his feet.

"No man can call me that and live! You make full and public apology right here now, sir, or you answer to me personally!"

They faced each other across the table. The Judge was cold and pale, sneering. Senator Marcus, a shorter, heavier set man, seemed on the verge of an apoplectic stroke.

Said the Judge:

"I should be glad to meet you, sir, in any place and at any time you choose."

And he bowed and stalked out. He had the sherry cobbler sent to his room instead.

The meeting did not occur. Respective friends prevented it. A duel in Ohio, on the one side, always was dangerous for all concerned; and it happened that the current Governor of Kentucky, on the other side, at that time was waging a campaign against the ancient method of settling disputes, so that a meeting there might land them all in jail.

Senator Marcus penned a formal challenge, but it was weeks before he could persuade anybody to deliver it for him. By that time the Judge was seriously ill of bronchitis, and his friends would not permit him to accept.

To be sure, the Judge upon his recovery had written a stiff, insulting acceptance of the challenge and sent this direct to the Senator—a highly irregular procedure which proved how very strong was the Judge's rage. That letter had miscarried. Another followed it, some time later, demanding an acknowledgment of the acceptance; but by then Senator Marcus was on business in New York, and so he did not receive this second letter until more than two months later. He answered it, and for some time an acrimonious correspondence was maintained; but it was impossible to arrange details, and eventually the correspondence was dropped.

Not that the matter died. It only slept. Judge d'Aurevilley did not forget the Senator, nor did Senator Marcus forget or forgive the Judge.

But it so happened that when, by the merest chance, Senator Marcus and Judge d'Aurevilley again came face to face, nobody paid them the slightest attention.

IT WAS on the riverfront at Memphis. The *Savoy* and the *Jacob T. Livingston* were tied within forty feet of each other, both scheduled to go down to New Orleans. There was a big shipment of cotton at Vicksburg, and everybody knew that it would go to the first boat to claim it. A matter of several thousand dollars in mere cash, yes, but a great deal more than that in prestige and future business. For the first time since she'd been put into service, eight years earlier, the pride of Comstock, Hyde & Co, the redoubtable *Savoy,* was having her supremacy of the lower river questioned. It was an open secret that the Pierce-Shannon flyer meant to race her to Vicksburg. Minutes counted. The *Savoy,* trembling under a heavy head of steam, her blue peter flying, her mail flag and company flags flying, was taking on her last piece of cargo; and roustabouts already held the ropes to haul in her landing planks. The *Livingston,* fresh from the St. Louis trip, would not sail for another half hour. But then, the *Livingston* did not carry mail, and the *Savoy* did.

Senator Marcus elbowed his way through the crowd to the landing planks.

"Is this the *Jacob Livingston?*"

"No, suh. This heah's the *Savoy,* suh."

"Damn that nigger! I told him to set me down at the *Livingston!*" The Senator started away.

"Better come on this heah boat, boss, if you wants to git there firs'. We're sho' goin' to make it ahead o' that tub, yes, suh! Ah's got fo' bits on it mahself."

"To hell with your four bits—my bags are aboard the *Livingston.* Please stop pushing me, you! Please let me pass here!"

A tall man accosted the roustabout at the landing plank.

"Have you seen that nigger of mine? Did he get aboard?"

"Yes, suh, Jedge. Jes' a few minutes ago. He was lookin' fo' you, suh." The roustabout added, "Better hurry, Jedge, suh, please. We jes' 'bout to pull out."

Then some instinct moved Alfred d'Aurevilley, and he turned to face the Senator. The Senator, who had recognized him, had not stirred, nor had he said anything. Judge d'Aurevilley seemed rather to sense his presence. He turned slowly, knowing who was there even before he saw him; and the two men stood, their faces not more than a few inches apart, in utter silence, star-

ing at each other for perhaps a full minute.

The Senator was the first to speak.

"I had made up my mind, sir," he said in a low voice, "that when I met you next I would shoot you on sight."

"You are at liberty to try it, sir."

They were silent again for a moment. Roustabouts and idlers, black and brown and white—steamboat men, clerks, gentlefolk, slaves—churned madly about them, murmuring, yelling, singing, calling messages to those who lined the *Savoy's* rails. A band on the dock was playing "Hail Columbia"; the boat's orchestra, too, was playing something, but nobody could hear what it was. Steam shrieked through the 'scape pipes on either side of the brightly ornamented pilot house. Coatless men rushed here and there with receipts and bills of lading. Officers, on the Texas deck, were bawling orders.

"Las' call! All asho' that's goin' asho'!"

Stewards hurried back and forth, all but shoving visitors off the boat, while the men who held the landing plank ropes stared hopefully at the officer who would give the cast-off command. Gamblers, planters and corpulent merchants scrambled up on packing cases, waved handfuls of cash and shouted the bets they were eager to make.

"My God, sir, I think I will!" Senator Marcus reached for his derringer in a waistcoat pocket.

Judge d'Aurevilley reached for his derringer.

But neither had a chance to draw. The crowd jostled and pushed and banged around them, and at this instant a boat's officer and a white steward grabbed the Judge, one on each side, and started to hustle him across the plank.

"Sorry to push you like this, sir—holding us up. Everything ready now—"

The Judge was wild with rage, but not at the men who were pushing him. Of them he was scarcely conscious: He did not even glance at them, never learned who they were. J. Haroldson Marcus was the only person in the world, so far as Judge d'Aurevilley was concerned. His chin on his shoulder, his mouth open in a snarl, he strained for a last glimpse of the man he hated. He could see Senator Marcus, his hat knocked off, his cravat disarranged, his face the color of a ripe plum, tossed here and there in the human sea. He could see the Senator's mouth moving, and he caught some of the words—

"—The very next time, sir, and without any—"

"At Vicksburg!" the Judge was yelling. "At Vicksburg!"

The landing planks went in with a clatter and a crash. The gallows-frame beam of the *Savoy,* like a thing shaking itself loose at last, began to go up and down, up and down; and the paddles clacked and spanked. The whole boat quivered. Water the color of coffee with a little cream in it churned and swirled in sudden agitation. The band finished "Hail Columbia" and without even pausing for breath started to play it all over again.

Flatboatmen in midstream and at nearby docks banged exuberantly on tin pans. The *Savoy* blew one short, chopped off salute, and she moved away—moved down the river with a rush. And Alfred d'Aurevilley, too angry even to curse, stood at the rail of the main deck and strove in vain to distinguish J. Haroldson Marcus's face among the multitude on the dock. Not until the first bend had obliterated Memphis from sight did the Judge go to his stateroom.

He found Kaysus unpacking.

"Here, you're mussing that suit, you black devil! Go on down below where you belong!"

There was no justification for the outburst; Kaysus had been doing his usual job in his usual manner. But the Judge was boiling. All he could think of—if it could be called thinking—was Haroldson Marcus — Haroldson Marcus's broad brown face, his full red lips, and his dark blue eyes, and the peculiar set of his head on his thick brown neck. Judge d'Aurevilley would have liked to wrap both his hands around that very neck and choke the man to death. Yes, choke him to death!

The damned, low, posing gambler, with his fancy silk waistcoats and his beavers and all his watch chains! His mother had been a Chilcote, and here was the whelp striving to act like a gen-

tleman! Pushing himself in among gentlemen, playing cards with them!

THE Judge, unpacking erratically, unthinkingly, encountered his pistol case. He opened it, quieting. For these were truly beautiful dueling pistols, these Williamsons from England—perfectly matched, long, lean, dark. The bases, Circassian walnut, extended almost to the tip of the blued steel barrels. The front sights were fine as razors; the strikers long, blue, hard; the stocks enscrolled with silver wiring in geometric designs.

His uncle had given him these weapons many years earlier, when first he had gone to New Orleans. "A lawyer needs good pistols, Alfred . . . " And now the Judge would part with any of his slaves—with any two or even three of them—rather than with his dueling pistols. Judge d'Aurevilley studied them for a long time, smiling a trifle grimly at first, then affectionately. If a man must die, he was thinking, he could not hope to die by any lovelier instrument.

If a man must die! He snapped the pistol box shut, abruptly angry again, his brows drawn down, his mouth tight. Weapons like these were too good for a Chilcote brat. Oh, they'd meet! They'd meet in Vicksburg; but it would be at the first place where they happened to encounter each other, and not at any appointed field. Dueling, after all, was a gentlemen's practise, and it should be confined to gentlemen.

The Judge slammed the door after him when he went out. He walked twice around the deck, head down, glowering. Everybody was talking about the race.

The smoke stood out from the serrated tops of the *Savoy's* stacks in columns almost parallel with the frothing, swelling wake. There were sparks in that smoke, too—sparks you could see even in the sunlight. The gallows-frame went up and down, up and down, wildly pulsing. The captain stood in the pilot house, now frowning upon the waters ahead, now sweeping the river behind with his little brass telescope.

A few moments after Judge d'Aurevilley came out on deck, they dropped the first sack of mail. They did not stop. The engines died suddenly, and the big boat drifted, ghost-like but very fast, toward the little dock where a small, silent group of negroes and whites awaited her. She almost rammed that dock—so that some of the watchers stepped back a bit frightened. Then she swung about, with a clang of signal bells; her engines were started again, her paddles began to clack, the terrific vibration was recommenced.

From the Texas deck a wooden arm shot out, and a sack of mail was thrown; the sack fell at the very edge of the dock, where it was caught and pulled back by eager hands. The *Savoy* completed her swing, presenting her stern and a series of angry waves to the dock. There was a cheer; and she was off again.

The captain went below—went down to where men were throwing pine blocks into the red furnaces.

"You boys want more whisky?" They nodded emphatically, without pausing. "I'll send down another pail an' another dipper. An' if we get to Vicksburg first I'll fix you-all so's you'll be swimmin' in the stuff!" He turned to the engineer. "You're puttin' oil on that wood?"

"Oh, sure!"

"There's still lots of steam comin' out of them 'scape pipes up there." He glanced at the arm of the safety valve. The weight was on the last notch but one. He glared at the engineer.

"I thought maybe we might save—"

"We save nothin'! Put it on the last notch!"

The captain tucked his telescope under his arm and returned to the Texas deck.

The engineer stared after him. He said to his cub:

"Ain't he a darlin', though? If he can't do it, Petey, then nobody can."

Judge d'Aurevilley went into the bar, and lengthily and moodily sipped a sherry cobbler. There was no other subject of conversation there but the race. On one side of the Judge—

"Say, she'll go boomin' past us any time now!"

"Maybe you got some money you'd care to back that assertion with, sir?"

"Money? Say, I put every cent I own

on that boat long before we sailed. An' it's as good as in my pocket this minute, too!"

"What are you traveling on this boat for, then, if you think the *Livingston's* faster?"

"Help the *Livingston,* o' course. That much more weight for this tub—that much less for the *Livingston.*"

"You talk that way much longer, sir, an' I expect some of these gentlemen here'll be relieving the *Savoy* of the weight you mention."

And on the other side of him—

"If it wasn't for the mail we might have a chance, but as it is I don't see how we can do it—unless the *Livingston* has an accident."

"Bah! The only accident she ever had was when she broke the *White's* record on the Donaldsonville run. I still can't understand how that happened. Why, this boat we're on—"

"I know, but don't you realize that the *Livingston's* got a thirty-inch bore and this boat's only got a twenty-eight-inch bore, and the *Livingston's* got a ten-foot stroke every time while this boat's—"

"Bah! Do you want to make it *two* cases of champagne then, if you're so sure of it?"

"I'll accept that, sir! I'll accept that! If this boat—"

THE Judge finished his cobbler, made two more turns around the deck and answered the first call to luncheon. The *Savoy* dropped another sack of mail as he was entering the dining saloon, and a third as he was leaving that chamber.

He went down to the main deck to make certain that Kaysus was comfortably housed. The boat trembled so that he had difficulty descending the stairs. He crossed the main deck sternward, stepping in and out among the lines, snubbing posts, loading carts, hooks, sounding apparatus, and short haul freight. The deck was littered with fish heads, scraps of food, brown spittle, cigar butts; but the prevailing smell was that of scorched oil from the engine room.

Kaysus was in the extreme stern, sitting on a barrel, swinging his legs and humming and chanting with some other negroes.

"Jaybird sat on hick'ry limb,
All cross ober to Jordan!
Ah up wid a rock an' Ah hit him on de chin,
All cross ober to Jordan!"

Kaysus assured his master—though it seemed incredible to the Judge—that the main deck was very comfortable, and he was happy there. He asked the Judge whether he thought the *Savoy* would get to Vicksburg first. The Judge replied that he didn't know and didn't care.

"Oh, Jer-oo-soo-lum!
All cross ober to Jordan!
Oh, Jer-oo-soo-lum!
All cross—"

An excited yell rose from the cabin passengers crowded along the stern rail of the promenade deck. The *Jacob T. Livingston* had been sighted.

Judge d'Aurevilley looked back up the river. And sure enough, there she came—there at the other end of the stretch, perhaps a mile away. Sparks and black smoke fairly sprang from her stacks, as though driven out by a fiend with whips. She clove the chocolate water madly, furiously. Those aboard the *Savoy* could see the bright, white clothes of the passengers who lined the rails; they could see the sun glistening upon the gilded gingerbread of the pilot house, and they could see the tall, proud finial atop that pilot house, all gilt, stiff and defiant. Yes, and they could even catch, faintly, something of the cheer that went up from the *Jacob T. Livingston* when her passengers and crew sighted the *Savoy.*

Then the *Savoy* rounded a bend, and the *Livingston* disappeared.

The captain lowered his glass and said to the pilot:

"They shouldn't catch us before we've tossed the McAllister's Landin' bag. That's the last one, too. We won't stop for more than a beat or two for that."

The pilot only shrugged.

The captain suggested slowly—

"We could cut through Devil's Alley—"

"We could," admitted the pilot, "except maybe Comstock-Hyde would dis-

like losin' this boat."

"—and I don't think Hendick'd dare follow us through there. We'd save a whole three miles."

"Lose more time 'n that'd save, soundin'."

"We won't sound," the captain decided quietly. "We'll just go through."

The pilot glanced at him sidewise, like a player with queens trying to make up his mind whether to call. Then the pilot shrugged again.

"Well, I'm a bachelor. Ain't nobody goin' to wail about me not comin' home."

"It'll be chockful of planters and sawyers, I suppose?"

"It will," said the pilot.

They cut a bend breathlessly close and moved in toward McAllister's Landing. The engines died, and the silence was horrible. The *Savoy* swerved. She slid, while steam shrieked through her 'scape pipes. Then the engines thumped up again, the vibration returned. The *Savoy* missed the dock by inches, and the mail sack was thrown. The *Savoy* straightened, rushing for midstream and the swifter current there.

But now the *Jacob T. Livingston* was in sight again—very close, dangerously close. Her stacks were blistered and reddened from the unaccustomed heat. Even in the sunlight they showed red. Men with hose lines were wetting her decks constantly. Her passengers were yelling and waving their arms.

The captain went down to the engine room. He watched the men throw thin black oil over the piled pine chunks. He watched them throw those chunks into the roaring furnaces. He screamed:

"If that pack o' stovewood an' scrap iron beats us to Vicksburg I'll gouge your damned eyes out! Every one of you!"

They grinned, but never paused for an instant.

The engineer came over.

"Those boilers—"

"That's what I'm down here for. Those boilers'll stand more. They *got* to! Rig a line to that valve arm an' tie it down!"

"But—"

"Are you the boss of this boat, or am I?"

The engineer shrugged.

"All right. Only when I meet you there tonight—down where they'll be stickin' us both in the backsides with pitchforks—don't say I didn't warn you, that's all."

The captain walked away. The engineer ordered his cub to tie down the arm of the safety valve.

"A couple of those kegs o' nails up forward ought to do."

"If them boilers—"

"Don't talk to me about them boilers, lad. I know all that myself."

JUDGE D'AUREVILLEY had not stirred from his place in the stern. Fascinated, he watched the speeding *Livingston* as she drew nearer and nearer to the Comstock-Hyde boat. A figure in the very bow of the *Livingston*—standing alone there next to some landing plank gear—had caught the Judge's eye. Motionless, statue-like, J. Haroldson Marcus stood and waited. The two men again were getting closer to each other, a little closer all the time.

The *Savoy* swerved. There was not a single wisp of steam standing out from her escape pipes now, and the vibration was terrific; everything on the boat rattled, straining; and the water of the wake lashed and hissed furiously as it sprang away from the paddle wheels.

The cut-off the pilots called Devil's Alley was behind some tiny islands near the east bank and navigable only in high water periods. Even then, vessels the size of the *Savoy* did not venture into it unless they took soundings ahead by means of a small boat. There were places where it was scarcely any wider than a canal, and not as deep.

The *Savoy* bore east toward this bank, toward the islands.

"You don't s'pose Hendrick'd dare follow us, do you? How much does that tub draw?"

"How much cargo's she carryin'?"

"Almost empty, I hear."

"How 'bout passengers?"

"About as many as we have. Hundred an' fifty maybe."

The pilot shrugged.

"She may try it then. She prob'ly don't draw above six or eight inches

more'n we do."

The captain looked back—something the pilot did not dare to do.

"My God, sir, she *is* goin' to try it!"

Gently but unmistakably, the *Jacob T. Livingston* was bearing toward the islands. And now most of the passengers, on both boats, were quiet. Those who never had been through Devil's Alley at least had heard of it. They knew that it required nerves of steel on the part of the pilot—and perhaps even more than that.

And all this time a man in the bow of the *Livingston* stared with concentrated hatred at a man in the stern of the *Savoy*. Each at least had definitely recognized the other. They did not move. Scarcely one hundred yards of agitated brown water separated them, and the *Livingston* was creeping closer all the time.

The *Savoy* went into the Alley. It was as though the great river suddenly had contracted its banks, becoming no more than a fast and muddy creek. For the moment, they could not see the *Jacob T. Livingston*, though they still could hear her. They could not see much of anything—not even the sky. It became abruptly dark there, and the *Savoy* seemed to be thundering down a tunnel of greenery. She came so close to the banks, sometimes, that the passengers could see the frightened squirrels on branches and they could pick handfuls of moss and leaves when the chinaberry trees and live-oaks brushed the deck rails.

The water wasn't chocolate covered any longer: It was black now from decayed vegetation churned up from the bottom, so shallow was the Alley. Sometimes, even with the throbbing of the engines, those aboard the *Savoy* could feel a scrape of sand underneath. At the speed the boat was going, one concealed snag—and there must have been thousands of them—would rip the bottom out like that much pasteboard.

The *Savoy* tore through one of the narrowest points and entered the Alley proper. This was perhaps fifty yards wide, two and a half to three miles long. At the other end was another mass of islands. They looked like solid shore to everybody but the pilot. And beyond them, but invisible, was the open river again.

The *Jacob T. Livingston* leaped into the open stretch, trembling, roaring, scattering smoke and sparks like an enraged amphibious monster. She was amazingly close. But that did not satisfy Captain Hendrick. *He* was out to pass the *Savoy* before the end of the Alley was reached! It would be a matter of inches, mere inches, between the two boats. The current was fast, dark, treacherous.

From somewhere, somehow, the *Jacob T. Livingston* summoned to her assistance another ounce of reserve speed. More and more surely she was reaching the *Savoy*. One snag now, one false move on the part of either of the pale, cold pilots, and both boats would be smashed.

Judge d'Aurevilley and Haroldson Marcus could have shouted to each other above the roaring of the engines; but they had nothing to shout. Motionless, glaring, they waited.

SENATOR MARCUS moved first. Without taking his gaze from Judge d'Aurevilley, he fumbled in his hip pocket, on the right side. He drew something out of that pocket. Judge d'Aurevilley, more astounded than frightened, saw that it was a tiny, black, double barreled derringer.

"The very next time, sir," he had yelled on the dock, "and without any—"

And he meant it! The Judge's reaction was one of increased fury. This damned Chilcote—posing, pretending, low-born gambler—daring, *daring* to try to shoot . . . The Judge drew his own derringer and cocked it, as Senator Marcus had cocked his. In the excitement of the race nobody noticed the two men preparing to kill each other. Weapons like these would not carry more than twenty or twenty-five feet; but the Judge and the Senator were not separated by a much greater distance than that. And inch by inch the *Jacob T. Livingston* was creeping up on the *Savoy*.

Judge d'Aurevilley saw Haroldson Marcus raise his pistol, taking aim. He raised his own pistol.

Then it happened. The Judge didn't hear it—didn't hear anything at all. The first he knew was a terrible blow between the shoulder blades. At almost the same instant something warm seemed to strike him in the face, and the world started one tremendous, unaccountable whirl. He was in the water, pushing, striking out with his fists, cursing, spitting. His face was hot, his ears were ringing; he couldn't feel the lower part of his body at all.

His head went under. The current, very strong, swept him along. When his head came up, a piece of board struck him in the left cheek. He threw both arms around the board and hung on, gasping. He could not swim.

Blinking, bewildered, he looked about him. There was nobody in sight. He was in the center of a small, curiously still pool of water. Nearby bobbed a deck chair, a woman's hat, two or three splintered boards like the one to which he was clinging, and part of a window curtain from the *Savoy's* lounge. He realized that he must have lost consciousness for a short time and been swept down among the islands at the lower end of Devil's Alley.

Feebly, desperately, he paddled with his left arm, got near the shore, grabbed a creeper, pulled himself up, and stumbled on his hands and knees through a mass of dangling creepers and Spanish moss upon the black slime of the bank. In his right fist he still grasped his derringer. He smiled grimly and thrust the thing back into a waistcoat pocket. Then he sat down, and with his head between his hands started to figure out what had happened.

To J. Haroldson Marcus, when the thing occurred, it was as if the *Savoy* had risen straight into the air, swelling like a balloon, and roaring. He was jerked forward. It felt as if some unseen giant had grabbed his coat lapels and given them a smart yank. At the time, this amazed him; later he realized that the force of air rushing into the vacuum created by the explosion, probably had been responsible.

He was thrown violently against the rail. His hat went overboard. As he strove to recover his balance there was another shock, and he was thrown flat on deck. There he lay for a moment, scowling, muttering, more angry than hurt. Then he sat up, looked around.

It all had happened in a few seconds. The *Jacob T. Livingston* had been racing breathlessly close to shore, and the explosion aboard the other boat had caused her to swerve—and in swerving, she had rammed the bank. Much of the Texas deck cabin structure had been torn away by the overhanging trees. All the windows were smashed, and so was most of the gingerbread work on the side facing the *Savoy*. Released steam shrilled through the *Livingston's* 'scape pipes, yet the boat was throbbing still—throbbing and panting like a wounded beast of the jungle.

Passengers appeared to have gone mad. They were screaming, yelling, clinging to the rails. Some of them were flat, moaning, whimpering. Some were on their knees, bellowing prayers. Others, who remained motionless, as if frozen, deadly pale, were swearing in hot, fervent undertones—just standing there swearing, stunned, unable to move.

The Senator was dizzy and shaken, but unhurt. He climbed to his feet and turned to face an even more horrible scene.

Only a few feet away, in and around what was left of the *Savoy*, men and women were yelling, kicking, splashing, waving their arms and shrieking. Some were cut and bleeding, bruised, hideously burned, lying motionless in grotesque positions in the wreckage. Some were in the water, thrashing madly. Some were clinging with bloodied hands to what remained of the superstructure—a twisted, blackened, smoking mass that might have adorned any artist's conception of Hades.

NEAR him, in the water, Senator Marcus saw two men and a woman. The men were swimming, or trying to. The woman simply screamed, and the current was carrying her downstream. Her mouth filled with water and her head went under. The Senator peeled off his coat, kicked off his gaiters and plunged into the river after her. He was a good swimmer, but the current in Devil's Alley was stronger than he had supposed.

When finally he did reach the woman she was floating, face down, apparently lifeless. He turned her face up and held her head high, swimming with one arm. She began to recover, began to struggle; her strength was astonishing, and for some minutes it was all the Senator could do to keep both of them afloat. Alternately he yelled for help and in a quieter voice tried to soothe the panicky woman.

He tried also to make for the shore. The shore, now, was closer than either the *Livingston* or the wreck of the *Savoy*. Boards, pieces of furniture, a mattress and other objects got in his way. Relentlessly, delighting in its strength, the current carried both of them downstream, swept them in among some islands, and eventually deposited them, hoarse, panting, exhausted, in a tiny pool where the water was quiet.

The woman, too, was quiet now. She had ceased to struggle. Her head up, her chin high, she stared with wild, strained eyes. Senator Marcus swam to shore with her, pulled her through some creepers and deposited her on the slimy bank. Rigid, wide eyed, she sat staring at him for a long time, never answering when he asked her if she were hurt. She was a young woman, and under ordinary conditions probably very pretty—though now, with her dress wet and muddy and torn, her hands and face bruised and cut, her hair plastered flat around her face and neck, she was anything but an object of beauty. Certainly Senator Marcus, as he fussed about her, experienced no romantic thrill but only a sensation of annoyance at her helplessness. But he was polite.

"We're perfectly safe here," he purred. "They're sure to find us soon. Likely enough somebody else will be washed up here, anyway, like we were."

"But—but what happened?"

He smiled.

"I guess that's what everybody else is asking right now. I don't know what it was, miss, but apparently the *Savoy* blew one or both of her boilers."

"I—I was on the *Savoy*."

"Then you were lucky you weren't killed," he told her solemnly. "I'm afraid a lot of them were."

Fright seemed to be her chief complaint, and she was rapidly recovering from that. Even her vanity was returning: She did her best to straighten her dress and pat her hair into some sort of order. Her cuts and bruises, though numerous and probably painful, were not serious and called for no immediate treatment. He himself, he learned upon examination, was badly bruised about the hands and right forearm, and scratched. There was a cut on his left cheek, too, but he stanched the blood flow by pressing his wet handkerchief against it. The day was warm, and there was no danger of either of them getting a chill. The Senator's watch, still ticking bravely, told him that it was not yet two o'clock; five or six hours of daylight remained to them, and surely they would be rescued in that time.

"I reckon we've landed on one of those little islands at the lower end of the Alley," he informed the girl.

Their only danger, he reasoned—though he didn't tell her this—would be from snakes. These jungles were filled with rattlers and cottonmouth moccasins, the most venomous of all reptiles.

"You can tell we're not far from the wrecks because you can still hear that steam escaping. Hear it?" He rose, stretching. "Suppose I take a look around, just to make sure nobody else has been washed up here."

From behind him, in a harsh, utterly cold voice, came:

"Save yourself the trouble, Senator. I've looked around already."

And he turned to face Alfred d'Aurevilley.

The 'scape pipes of the distant *Jacob T. Livingston* shrilled their last, and the sound died on the still hot air like the end of a long sigh; so that there was utter silence in that little backwater of the Mississippi.

"Well?" the Judge said coldly.

Senator Marcus snapped—

"Well what, sir?"

The woman, seated between them, stared wildly from one to the other, uncomprehending.

"I had understood that you were going to shoot me at sight when we next met," the Judge reminded.

"And so I would, sir, if I could, be sure of that!"

"But you lost your pistol, eh?" said the Judge.

"I have another." He patted a waistcoat pocket.

"You go well armed. But, then, I suppose you gamblers are obliged to do that—"

"Insults from you, sir, no longer mean anything to me. But if my powder were still dry—"

"Ah, so that's the trouble?" The Judge drew a small, flat silver case from one of his coat pockets. "Perhaps we can still satisfy your bloodthirstiness, sir. I too have a pistol with me, and this powder case is supposed to be waterproof."

He opened it, stirred its contents with a forefinger and nodded.

"Perfectly dry," he reported. "I see no reason why we shouldn't share this—there's just about enough for two discharges."

"In other words—"

"In other words, let's have this thing out here and now. I'm tired of your cheap boasts."

The Senator nodded, smiling briefly. He seemed in that moment almost to be admiring Alfred d'Aurevilley.

"There's a small clearing about two hundred feet back here," the Judge said. "I've just come through it." He nodded toward the girl. "It would take us out of sight," he said.

She spoke now, for the first time since the Judge's appearance.

"You—you-all aren't going to fight, are you?"

Judge d'Aurevilley nodded gravely.

"That," said Senator Marcus, "is our intention, miss."

"But—but what's going to happen to *me*?" she wailed.

The Senator said coldly:

"One of us will return from where we are going, and he—whichever he is—will be your guardian. You're in no danger anyway. Some rescue party is certain to show up soon." He turned to Judge d'Aurevilley. "Your servant, sir. If you'll lead the way—"

The Judge walked off without another word, and Senator Marcus followed him. They were both silent, cold, very stiff.

THE girl simply sat there. In her confused condition—and perhaps she was none too intelligent anyway—she somehow had come to suppose that these men were about to fight a duel over her; and she thought she ought to do something about it. She thought of rushing through the jungle after them, throwing herself between them, imploring them not to fight. She thought of screaming—just screaming at the top of her lungs, in order either to fetch them back to her or else to attract some rescue party. Actually she did nothing at all. She simply sat there, wild eyed, her mouth open, her brain in a whirl, strained, tense, listening.

After what seemed like an hour—probably it was about five minutes—there came a shot. One shot—loud, deep, shocking. It seemed to shatter the complacency of the leaves and of the dangling gray Spanish moss that hung in lank festoons everywhere. It went crashing through the hot air, the sound of that shot, and set a million tiny echoes into motion among the islands of Devil's Alley. Then those echoes all tumbled away, one after the other, and there was profound silence again. She heard somebody coming back toward her. She turned—and saw both Senator Marcus and Judge d'Aurevilley. Each was walking upright, and apparently unwounded.

When they got clear of the foliage, Judge d'Aurevilley extended his right hand to Senator Marcus.

"It was handsomely done, sir. Nobody but a true gentleman would behave in that manner under the circumstances. I wish to apologize for any harsh things I may have said to or about you. I was mistaken, sir."

Senator Marcus took the hand.

"I only did what any gentleman would do, sir. It would have been a great pity to see the representative of so distinguished a family killed by a mere snake."

The girl stammered—

"Wha—what happened?"

Judge d'Aurevilley told her.

"Senator Marcus, miss, saw a poisonous snake, a moccasin, about to bite my leg. He fired at it—the one shot he had in his pistol. He killed it. An instant

later and it would have killed me, for I hadn't seen it."

"Oh—he saved your life?"

"Precisely. And we have settled our differences, miss."

"I'm so glad," she murmured.

She leaned back against a tree, closing her eyes. It would be a wonderful story to tell them when she returned to the boat.

That event took place soon afterward. A small rowboat appeared, and a single, slow moving darky rowed them back to the scene of the double wreck. The *Jacob T. Livingston* still was more or less habitable.

"If the bar is still functioning," Judge d'Aurevilley said, "I should be proud to have you join me in a sherry cobbler made under my own direction. I flatter myself, sir, that I possess the very finest recipe for a cobbler to be found anywhere."

"I should be delighted to join you, Judge."

They turned their female charge over to the stewardess, both solemnly bowing her a farewell. They had not even asked her name. And a little later, in the barroom, Judge d'Aurevilley chuckled quietly. Senator Marcus looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"I just remembered," the Judge explained, "that as we crossed the main deck down there I heard somebody say, 'Look at those two! Why, they've been enemies for years and years! What do you suppose ever brought them together?' And somebody else said, 'Well, they were stranded on an island for some hours with a pretty woman. Oh, I tell you,' this fellow said, 'there's nothing like a woman for bringing together a couple of men!' "

The Judge chuckled again, and finished his drink.

"And to think that, if they only knew, it wasn't a woman at all but a snake, sir!"

Senator Marcus signaled to the bartender.

"We will drink to that snake now, sir. You must let me buy this one, Judge."

SALT

By Seymour G. Link

SEA SALT tinctures my gypsying blood;
Sea thoughts come over me nights, like a flood,
Trying to wash my heart away,
Stinging my face with remembered spray,
Bringing me back through the land-locked years
Till the salt of the sea is the salt of my tears.

I may have been able to leave the sea,
But it never has loosed its hold on me;
It ebbs about my shore-tight bed;
It eddies around my tossing head;
It robs me of all my nightly rest,
Clutching my dreams to its throbbing breast.

And this I know. If I die ashore,
My soul shall seek the sea once more
And travel home as a seaman should,
Feet first, head up, from a plank of wood.

The CABLEGRAM

By T. S. STRIBLING

IN THE course of his evasions over the telephone, Mr. Henry Poggioli, investigator in criminal psychology, said apologetically—

"Mr. Slidenberry, my work here in Miami is purely theoretic, and if I devote any time to practical crimes . . ."

"But this is theoretic," pressed the voice in the receiver earnestly. "The *Stanhope* is due in today and we want you to go aboard with us and—"

"If the trouble is aboard a ship it must be smuggling," surmised the scientist. "I am really no expert as a baggage searcher."

"Oh, it isn't that at all. It's an A. J. P. A. cablegram."

"Let's see — that's the American Jewelers' Protective Association?"

"Right you are, Doctor, and the trouble is we can't quite decode it."

There was something whimsical in the Miami customs force receiving a cablegram which they could not decode. Mr. Poggioli smiled over the telephone as he suggested—

"If you have it by you would you like to read it to me over the wire?"

"M-m—we'd a lot rather you'd come down to the docks, but if you think you can decode the thing right off . . ."

Came a pause, and after about a half minute interval the voice began again:

"Here it is:

"BARBERRY. EXTREME CARE. STANHOPE. 36-B — FEATHERS — CONSULAR REPORTS 1915 PP. 1125-6. REWARD CLAIMED.—J. DUGMORE LAMPTON, CARE AMERICAN CONSULATE, BELIZE, B. C. A."

"What is it you don't understand?" inquired the psychologist.

"Feathers—do you know what feathers means?"

"I don't know what any of it means."

"The rest is simple. Barberry means a diamond smuggler. *Stanhope* is the name of a ship that will dock here in half an hour. The 36-B is his cabin number. The rest is just plain English. If we capture him J. Dugmore Lampton wants the reward offered by the American Jewelers' Protective Association."

"What about the consular reports?"

"Don't know yet. I set a clerk to looking up the reports for 1915. We keep them in the attic of the customs house in goods boxes. This is the first time anybody ever had any reason to refer to them."

"You don't suppose consular reports could be another code word?"

"No; we suspected that at first. We searched through all the codes, but 'consular reports' seems to have no meaning beyond just—you know, the actual reports themselves."

"That's an extraordinary detail of your telegram," Poggioli admitted after a pause. "It creates a kind of puzzle as to the sender of the message."

"How's that?"

"That he should not only quote the consular reports, but he is so familiar with them he actually refers to a particular page."

"The man is probably in the consular service himself," returned the customs officer.

"That doesn't alter anything. Every consul knows that the consular reports are never read, are never filed away properly and are seldom even preserved. Really, Mr. Slidenberry, your cablegram is not only puzzling, it is enigmatic."

"Really, Doctor," interposed the inspector, "we wish you'd come down here yourself and see—"

"I think I will; yes, I'll come. But while I'm on the way down, please cable Belize and get a report on J. Dugmore Lampton. I would like to know something more about a man who refers in a cablegram to a particular page in the American consular reports."

Fifteen minutes later a group of three uniformed men met Mr. Poggioli's taxi at pier 26. Captain Slidenberry gripped the arrival's hand.

"She's just swinging in now, Dr. Poggioli," he said gratefully. "Come on inside. The passengers will be down immediately."

"Now, as I said," cautioned the psychologist, "I am utterly inexperienced in searching baggage."

Slidenberry held up a hand.

"The boys will take care of that."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Well, I want you to look over the passenger who occupies cabin 36-B and tell me if he is the type of man who would hide his diamonds in his baggage, or drop them in the pocket of some fellow passenger to be retrieved later—or would he wrap his gems in meat and feed them to his pet dog?"

Poggioli smiled and shook his head.

"There may be some physiological index to classify the different types of smugglers; they say it's true of murderers. I haven't gone into the matter yet."

"How would you like to make your headquarters here and measure all the smugglers we arrest?"

"I'll think that over. By the way, you cabled for the information about J. Dugmore Lampton?"

"Certainly, but I don't see how that information can aid us here?"

"Well, don't you think it queer to quote a consular report?"

"Mm—ye-es—queer enough, but what is the connection between a diamond smuggler at this end of the line and a man quoting the reports at the other?"

"I have no idea. That's what we want to see. When anything seems queer, Mr. Slidenberry, that is merely a psychologic signal that it has connections with something we do not understand. In any crime queerness may very well be a clue."

THE psychologist's theory was interrupted by cabin boys streaming down the gangplank of the *Stanhope* bringing luggage and arranging it in alphabetic piles. Captain Slidenberry went aboard to the window of the ship's purser and asked who occupied room 36-B. The purser ran his finger down the passenger list.

"Dr. Xenephon Quintero Sanchez—what's the matter with Dr. Sanchez?"

"That's what we are trying to find out, Purser."

The purser touched his cap.

"His bags will be in the S pen, sir."

Slidenberry was searching among the S's for the initials X.Q.S. when a cabin boy came up and touched his cap.

"Excuse me, sir, but the passenger in 36-B asks if you will please come to his cabin?"

The inspector became suspicious at once.

"What's the point in that? Why doesn't he bring down his keys?"

"His bags are not down yet," explained the boy. "He sent me to ask if you would please examine them in his cabin."

Slidenberry lifted an eyebrow at

Poggioli, and the two men started aboard the *Stanhope*. When they reached stateroom 36-B Slidenberry tapped on the door, and a man's voice called—

"Enter, señor, and pardon my occupation."

The shutter swung open and Poggioli saw a heavy man of dark complexion and dissipated features sitting on his bunk apparently cutting up his wardrobe with a pair of scissors. Two or three garments already were in pieces, and he was taking out the lining of a coat. The two visitors stood looking at the queer sight.

"Are you a tailor, Mr. Sanchez?" inquired Slidenberry.

The heavy man on the bunk made a deprecatory gesture.

"A kind of analytic tailor, señores. I am preparing to make my declaration in customs."

"Just how?" inquired the inspector dryly. "Are you trying to reduce the value of your wardrobe?"

Sanchez shrugged.

"I am trying to find out what my portmanteau contains, señores."

"Don't you know already?" asked Slidenberry in a brittle voice.

"I do not," stated Sanchez sharply. "I know what I put in my baggage, but what others have slipped into it I have no way of knowing except by some such method as this." He jabbed his shears into a garment.

As Mr. Poggioli viewed this irrational scene there seemed a touch of something familiar in the old Latin's somber face. He stood trying to recall where he had met the man while Slidenberry went on with his astonished questioning.

"Do you mean some one has slipped something in your bags?"

"That's what I mean, señor."

"Why didn't you find out before the *Stanhope* entered customs?"

"Because I did not want to sit in my cabin all day long to make sure nothing else was added. I wanted to go to my meals, take the air, sleep."

Slidenberry looked at the old man intently, then glanced at Poggioli, said, "Pardon us a moment," and drew the psychologist outside the cabin.

"Crazy," he said in an undertone, "or do you think it's a hoax?"

"Our cablegram shows there is a reality to it somewhere, so I would mark out insanity."

"But if it's a hoax why didn't he select a more reasonable falsehood?"

"You know, the fact that it's unreasonable is an argument for its truth," pointed out Poggioli—"that is, if he really isn't insane."

"That somebody actually planted dutiable goods of value in his bags?"

Poggioli shrugged.

"But whoever did would lose money on it," went on Slidenberry. "His reward would be only a part of the value of the goods smuggled. He would certainly lose half of his investment even if his scheme worked."

"This can't be simply a trick to get a reward," agreed Poggioli at once. "There is something—something else—" The scientist drew out a cigaret and tapped it on his thumbnail. "You know—I've seen that old man before!"

"Something criminal?" asked Slidenberry hopefully.

"Must have been, if I remember him."

"Good, good." The inspector nodded. He turned back into the cabin. "Dr. Sanchez," he began, "I want to ask you pointblank: Have you any diamonds to declare?"

"I don't know," said the old man, still scissoring away. "That's what I'm trying to find out for you."

"Do you think somebody hid diamonds in your trunk and clothes?"

"I have no idea what they hid—diamonds possibly."

Slidenberry gave a brief smile.

"Suppose you let me help you hunt. I've a knack at that sort of thing."

Dr. Sanchez straightened and held up a prohibitory hand.

"Not as you are, señor, please," he said with a dry smile.

"Not as I am—what do you mean?"

"I mean, señor, not with your coat and vest and trousers on, if you please."

The customs officer stared in amazement.

"Are you suggesting that I undress myself to inspect your—"

Poggioli interposed—

"He means he is afraid *you* will put

something in his bags and then arrest him for having it."

Slidenberry looked at Poggioli, tapped his forehead and shook his head slightly.

"Listen, Señor Sanchez," reasoned Poggioli, "no matter what Mr. Slidenberry should plant in your trunk he could not arrest you for it. You have declared that you don't know what your baggage contains. All he could do would be to confiscate anything illegal he discovered or let you pay the duty on it and keep it yourself. Either way he would lose and you would go free."

Sanchez nodded.

"That is the legal theory—but if he slipped something in my pocket and I walk off the ship carrying goods on which I have paid no duty, I go to jail. That has happened to me many times, señor."

The psychologist was astonished and incredulous.

"You don't mean to tell me the customs officers themselves—"

Sanchez interrupted—

"Certainly, señor; there is no tyranny so inescapable and so difficult to prove as that of the police department."

"But why should the customs officers themselves wish to—" Poggioli broke off, studying the old man's almost remembered face.

Dr. Sanchez shrugged, then spoke in a bitter voice—

"If I were a North American, señor, I would not only tell you my story; I would also tell the newspapers and the radio broadcasters, but we Latin-Americans—" he spread his palms sardonically—"feel somewhat differently about our private affairs."

"In my opinion," interposed Slidenberry dryly, "you handle not only your private affairs with the greatest reticence, but the truth also. The idea of a customs officer planting something in the baggage of a traveler! It was never done in the history of American customs."

The old man bristled at such an insult, but the dawning quarrel was interrupted by the voice of a cabin boy paging Captain Slidenberry. The officer stepped outside to call the boy, and Poggioli followed curiously.

AS THE messenger came up, the inspector turned to Poggioli and asked sharply:

"What do you think of him now? Is he crazy, or is he just a hopeless liar?"

Poggioli shook his head.

"If he really has been framed—"

"Framed, the devil! Did you ever hear of customs men framing a casual traveler?"

"I never did, but it is the most probable explanation of this riddle."

"You don't mean it has really happened?"

"I do because the old man doesn't insist on it. If he were a simple liar he would have gone on with a long cock and bull story to prove what he said was the truth, but he simply says it's so."

Slidenberry shook his head.

"You may believe it for psychologic reasons if you want to, but I'm a customs man. No such thing ever happened on the face of the earth!"

The messenger boy came running up the deck and delivered a parcel. Slidenberry signed for it and opened it.

"Oh," he ejaculated, "the clerk has found the consular reports at last. Let me see; what was the page?" He drew out his cablegram and consulted it. "1125 and 6."

The inspector turned through the pages until he found his citation, then stood looking at it blankly.

Poggioli glanced over his shoulder, then drew in his breath.

"Oh—that man!" he ejaculated.

The inspector turned sharply.

"That man? What man?"

"Read there at the bottom of the page."

Slidenberry read with an uncomprehending expression,

> July 5th. Today visaed the passport of the Magnificent Pompalone. Shipped him to Guiana on the French Line.

"Of course! Of course! Of course!" shouted Poggioli in amazed remembrance. "Dr. Sanchez is the Magnificent Pompalone—or once was. Heavens, yes, I remember him now!"

Slidenberry looked around.

"Who is he—or was he?"

"Why he's an ex-dictator of Venezuela."

"Is what he says true?"

"I suppose it is. In fact, I'm sure it is."

"But, Mr. Poggioli, how is it possible—"

"Why, you see, a group of nations—America, England, France, Holland and some others—went into an agreement not to allow the ex-dictator to return to his country because he would start another revolution. That would upset business and cost everybody money and time. When I knew him the Dutch authorities were trying to keep him on Curaçao, but he got away during a storm."

Slidenberry was amazed.

"Then there must be some truth in what he's telling. I suppose the authorities got tired of following him about and just lodged him in jail on some charge or other as the easiest way to keep him."

"Certainly. And what could be simpler than a customs offense?"

The inspector was moved at the old man's trials.

"Well, I'm going back and tell him he has nothing to fear from me."

The two men reentered the stateroom and found Dr. Sanchez sitting on his bunk, which was scattered with small, snowy, harp-like designs. The old man said acridly—

"I trust, señores, my finding these hasn't upset any plan you may have had to land me in prison."

Slidenberry exclaimed automatically—

"Poggioli, there are the feathers!"

Dr. Sanchez laughed with brief irony.

"Officer, I declare these egret feathers. I don't know how many there are."

The inspector looked blankly at the ornaments.

"You can't enter these in the United States; they are prohibited."

"I know that, señor. It has always struck me as touchingly beautiful for the American people to be so considerate of the wild birds of Venezuela while they kept a Venezuelan imprisoned year after year for fear he might go home and upset their commerce."

Slidenberry paid no attention to this.

"What are you going to do with your feathers? They can't go ashore."

For answer the old man drew out his cigar lighter, snapped a flame and began applying it to the egrets one by one. The stench filled the cabin. Slidenberry watched the destruction rather blankly.

"Have you got any diamonds in your bags?" he asked after a space.

"That I don't know," said the ex-dictator.

"Well, since you have feathers, I suspect you have diamonds too."

"Why? Do the two things go together?"

"So I've been informed."

"If I fail to find them and you do find them, will I be put in prison as a smuggler?" inquired the old man.

"Of course not," snapped the inspector. "If you actually help me search your bags for diamonds we'll be partners in the matter, won't we?"

With this agreement the two returned to the work in good earnest, rummaging through the trunks and the rest of the clothes. Slidenberry was more expert than the ex-dictator; he examined the trunks for false bottoms and double tops; he ran his fingers along the seams of the coats and trousers; he looked under the lining of Dr. Sanchez's hat. In the midst of this work he pushed aside a stray envelop on the floor with the toe of his shoe. A faint tinkle made him stoop and pick it up. He opened the flap and looked inside.

"Here they are," he said dryly.

Poggioli was astonished.

"You don't mean they were thrown around loose like that!"

"That's part of the technique," returned the inspector, "hiding it right under our eyes."

Dr. Sanchez watched this discovery impassively.

"What would you have done, señor," he inquired, "if by chance I had picked up the envelop before you did?"

The customs officer had to think twice before he knew what the old man meant, then he exclaimed—

"You think I put them there!"

"Think?" snapped the old man in sudden wrath. "I know it! Do you imagine I would deliberately help you customs men land me in jail by attempting to smuggle so much as a pin into

your country?"

Slidenberry studied the exiled Venezuelan—

"You and I started searching for these diamonds together, didn't we?"

Sanchez nodded slowly and questioningly.

"You admitted you had them—or might have them—but neither of us knew where they were?"

"*Si, señor*—and what is your conclusion?" asked Sanchez in suspense.

"My conclusion is you have declared these diamonds and all that is required is for you to pay the normal duty on them and enter this country as a free man, señor."

Poggioli interrupted.

"Look here," he pointed out. "These diamonds were *not* mislaid in a chance envelop in the middle of the floor. That's impossible."

Slidenberry gave a short laugh.

"I know that, but under the circumstances I am going to rule arbitrarily that these diamonds were mislaid and found."

The scientist turned to the passenger.

"Dr. Sanchez, how do you explain this envelop?"

"Señor," said the old man, "why does so simple a thing need any explanation? Captain Slidenberry comes into my room and throws a package of diamonds on my floor. He means to arrest me, but for some reason he has a change of heart—"

"Look here," interrupted Slidenberry, "you know that's a falsehood!"

"Slidenberry! Slidenberry!" protested the psychologist. "Maybe he actually believes what he says!"

"How can he? Either he or I—"

"No, not necessarily; some third person could have stepped in here and dropped the envelop; then each one of you would think the other did it."

"What third person?"

"I don't know—the man who sent the cable; another inspector besides yourself. You see, when the United States has pledged itself to keep Dr. Sanchez out of Venezuela, what easier method would there be than to keep him in jail?"

Slidenberry nodded, unconvinced, and cooled off.

"Well, at any rate, I have agreed to let Sanchez go free when he pays the duty on these jewels. I stand by my agreement."

AS THE inspector said this Poggioli poured some of the stones out in his palm and looked at them, at first casually, then with dawning astonishment and suspicion.

"Mr. Slidenberry," said the scientist in an odd tone, "Dr. Sanchez didn't bring these stones on this ship."

"Why do you say that?" demanded the officer.

The criminologist handed over the jewels.

"Because they're glass."

The inspector received the sparkling bits incredulously, or at least with an excellent imitation of incredulity.

"Then I should say," he diagnosed slowly, "that Dr. Sanchez was fooled in his purchase."

Poggioli shook his head.

"No, an ex-dictator, an ex-millionaire, would hardly mistake paste for diamonds."

"Then what is there to think?" demanded Slidenberry quite at sea.

"Well, if some third person didn't bring the sack in here—"

"You mean I did?" cried Slidenberry, amazed.

"What else is there to think? Sanchez didn't do it."

"Look here," cried Slidenberry, thrown for a moment on the defensive, "it's absurd the idea of my doing such a thing! I couldn't incriminate Dr. Sanchez with such brummagen as this! There's no law against bringing glass into America!"

The old Latin-American himself shook his head slowly.

"I believe this is the most complicated plot that has ever been woven around me," he said. "If it had been in a French port I would not have been surprised. Even the Dutch might have originated it; but for simple minded North Americans to hatch up anything so complicated—it amazes me."

Suddenly Slidenberry tossed the envelop on the bunk.

"I've got it!" he announced triumph-

antly, turning to confront the psychologist with a grim smile. "I've got it now!"

"What is it?" inquired Poggioli.

"Why, that was a blind to throw us off the trail, of course. Now let's get to work and find the real stones!"

As the inspector searched, Poggioli introduced himself to the dictator and recalled to him the matter of the murder in Curaçao. The old adventurer was immensely moved.

"*Gracias a Dios* that I should see that clever young American again before I die," he cried. "The mystery you solved in that godforsaken island, señor, was much darker than that which surrounds me now."

The old man arose, embraced and kissed Poggioli in the affectionate Venezuelan manner.

"But still this is rather an oddly twisted case, Dr. Sanchez," suggested Poggioli.

"Puh, nothing of the sort; simply a customs inspector trying to send me to jail with glassware!"

Poggioli looked puzzled.

"But why is he searching so thoroughly now?"

"To save his face, señor."

"But, señor, look at him. That isn't the psychology of a desultory search. It isn't necessary to squeeze out your shaving cream to save his face. Then he found feathers in your room. He didn't bring them in with him."

"No-o. That is a queer thing, señor. Feathers—was the inspector expecting feathers?"

"Yes, he was. I'll tell you the truth, señor; he had a cable from Belize instructing him to search you for feathers and diamonds."

"Oh la! So those feathers were sewn into my military uniform in British America!"

"Or possibly on the voyage here. The cable could have been filed ahead of time to be sent later."

"You have a great head, señor; you think of every combination that can possibly exist. You catch the truth not in the Latin style of a burst of divination, but in the North American style of wearing her down by endless analysis, of making her surrender out of sheer boredom, Señor Poggioli."

This somewhat dubious compliment was interrupted by Slidenberry. He arose from his search, stood balked in the middle of the cabin.

"You may go," he said slowly, "I pass your trunks. I find nothing dutiable in them."

The old man looked at him cryptically.

"I can go ashore free?"

"That's what I said."

Sanchez shrugged.

"Do you imagine I would fall into so obvious a trap as that, señor?"

Slidenberry stared at the Latin.

"What the hell are you talking about now?"

Dr. Sanchez sighed wearily.

"You know very well. You find glassware; you say, 'These are not his diamonds; I will find genuine diamonds.' Well, I am as wary as you. I look at the glassware; I say to myself, 'These are not his diamonds; I will be as clever as he is and avoid his genuine diamonds.'" The old man patted himself on the chest.

Slidenberry looked at him.

"I almost thank God I don't know what you are talking about."

"I'll make myself clear. How easy it would have been for you to have hidden a real diamond in my trunk or toothpaste or clothes; then, when I step ashore, I will be searched and, la! caged up again."

"Good Lord, you don't think I'd plant a real diamond—"

"Think! I know it. Why would you make such a stir with paste if you did not intend to plant a real one?" The old man laughed.

Slidenberry looked at him.

"Really, our faith in each other is touching. All right, what do you intend to do if I can't even clear your baggage and let you go ashore?"

"This," said the old Venezuelan pungently. "By the strangest coincidence there is a man in my cabin whom I can trust. I am going to ask Señor Poggioli to take my money ashore, buy me a complete new outfit of clothes, bring them back here, let me dress and disembark from this ship in a virgin costume."

WITH this the old man went to his trunk, drew out a canvas bag of specie, silver and gold, swung it toward Poggioli and set it clinking on a chair.

The psychologist looked at the old man in amazement.

"Why any such rigmarole as this, señor?" he asked curiously.

"Señor," said Sanchez, "how can you ask me? You know how long I have sweated in prison on trumped up charges. You would be wary too if you saw ahead of you one tiny glimpse of freedom."

Poggioli stood pondering this new development when Slidenberry nodded him aside. When they were outside the cabin door the inspector whispered intently—

"Well, what do you make of that, Dr. Poggioli?"

"I think—I think that throws a new light on the subject," answered the psychologist carefully.

"How?"

"This is a positive move. Don't you see—up to this point his maneuvering has been negative and defensive; now it is for me to do something for him."

"But, listen," pressed the inspector, "don't you see it works out just right for us? If he takes absolutely nothing ashore, he takes nothing ashore—does he? Now I believe he's cracked—as you would say, got a complex, not to say a mania—on the subject of prisons. I suppose he has been driven to it by his experiences which you describe. So, if you don't mind, I wish you would go get him an outfit and let him walk off the ship in his birthday clothes as far as anything he brought into this country is concerned."

Poggioli could see why Slidenberry jumped at such an opportunity. He agreed to the plan, full of vague suspicion created by this new quirk of the ex-dictator. Dr. Sanchez handed him the bag of Venezuelan coins, gave him a money changer's address in the Latin quarter of Miami and also a list of the shirt, suit and shoe sizes that he wore. The psychologist went ashore in an odd mood.

The money changer was in Miramar Street near the harbor. He ran a mere booth, arranged in the room of a private house, evidently one of those men who attend to the wants to his fellow Venezuelans before they learn the ways of American banks.

The fellow weighed the gold and silver coins in a pair of scales instead of counting them and gave Poggioli the exchange in American money.

An hour later the scientist took the clothes on board the *Stanhope*. Slidenberry had occupied his time by researching everything in the cabin, but without results. The whole affair would apparently remain an unsolved mystery, that is if it really were a mystery and not the maunderings of an unbalanced brain.

Dr. Sanchez had Slidenberry stand completely outside the cabin while he changed his apparel from hat to shoes. Then he pointed to his baggage.

"That I am going to leave in bond, señores, until I get ready to sail from this country. Then I'll search it myself and see what you planted in it at the last hour."

The inspector shook his head.

"Crazy as bedlam," he said, as he and Poggioli watched Sanchez go ashore.

AFTER the ex-dictator had gone the different phases of the incident simmered in Poggioli's mind. No two pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit together. Slidenberry, too, was curious, but he was relieved.

"That was a devil of a layout," he said. "Egret feathers, glass diamonds. I suppose they really must have been planted by that J. Dugmore Lampton, after all—he was an English customs officer, and he was no doubt following precedent in the consular reports when he arranged for Sanchez to be seized at this end of the line."

"Why did Sanchez wish that complete change of clothes?" pressed Poggioli, unsatisfied. "You know he could have worn ashore his shirt, undershirt, socks—"

"Oh, that was just his obsession, his craziness."

"All right. Admit that. Then why did J. Dugmore Lampton quote the consular reports? As I said long ago, if he

is a consul he knows those reports go in the discard the moment they are published. For Lampton's memory to go back to 1915, and quote reports of that year, that isn't human, Mr. Slidenberry."

"Well, I'm not worrying about that end of the line," the inspector laughed. "Sanchez is ashore and he took nothing with him."

At this moment a Western Union boy came bicycling down the wharf and rounded into the inspector with a message.

Slidenberry looked at the enclosure, then puckered his brow and read aloud:

"NO SUCH PERSON AS J. DUGMORE LAMPTON REGISTERED WITH AMERICAN CONSULATE AT BELIZE. ERROR POSSIBLE. MAY BE J. HAMILTON SMITH."

The two men stood holding this second cablegram between them, looking at it.

"Well," said Slidenberry slowly, "so there was no J. Dugmore Lampton, or if there is one he is not expecting any reward after all—"

Poggioli burst out:

"My heavens! Of course, of course, that's the solution of it!"

"What? What's the solution of what?"

"The whole thing! There isn't any Lampton. Dr. Sanchez himself sent that cablegram. Why didn't I think of that at once? Of course he is the only man in the world who could quote year and page of consular reports as far back as 1915 because you see his name is mentioned in them. In fact, he was deported then. He would have no trouble at all remembering the date."

"But there's no sense to that!" cried Slidenberry. "What in the world would he want to make all this trouble for himself for?"

"He is like a sleight-of-hand performer; he wanted to center our attention on diamonds and feathers while he slipped something else past us. He wanted to make absolutely sure of it. I suppose he needs money for some new revolutionary undertaking."

Slidenberry dropped his hands hopelessly.

"But, look, man, he didn't go ashore with anything—nothing at all. Even his clothes are new!"

Poggioli laughed wryly.

"No-o, he didn't, but I did."

Slidenberry looked surprised.

"You—you went ashore—what with?"

"Why, his money, of course; I took that ashore, didn't I?"

"But money can't conceal diamonds and egret feathers!"

"Of course not, but you could take a five-bolivar piece, couldn't you, and—come on, come on, let's get to that money changer's address and look into this thing."

The two men hailed a taxi and whirled a few blocks to Miramar Street. When they reached the house, a very simple old householder met them.

"Where is that money changer, the one I traded with an hour or so ago?" hurriedly asked the psychologist.

The householder, who was an Equadorian, spread his hands.

"Señores, he gave up his room. He is gone. Did he cheat you? No, I hope not."

"No, he didn't cheat me! He smuggled dope—cocaine, I imagine—out of a ship down at the docks."

"Are you Señor Poggioli?" asked the householder.

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"A very fine gentleman left with me a note and a little token. He said you would call and get it."

"Well, give it to me!"

The Equadorian hustled away for a moment and returned with a note and a five-bolivar piece. The note said:

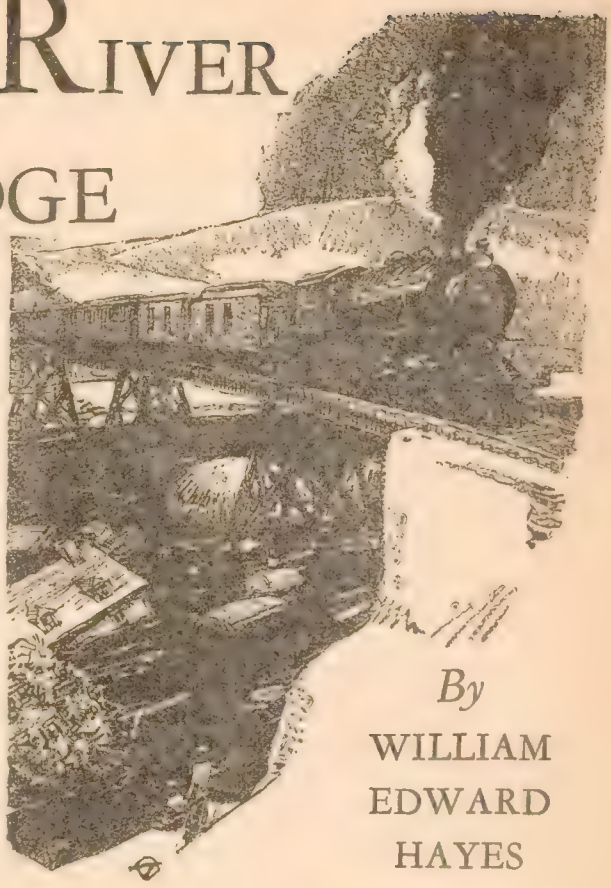
Muchas gracias, señor, for your highly esteemed services. I am leaving you a little souvenir which will assure that your deductions, although somewhat tardy, are correct.

Always your friend and admirer,

—XENOPHON QUINTERO SANCHEZ

The souvenir was a very light five-bolivar piece. Poggioli twisted it experimentally. It unscrewed and disclosed the fact that it was a small silver container. It was empty and had been cleaned thoroughly. Legally it proved nothing.

White River Bridge



By
WILLIAM
EDWARD
HAYES

THE slate gray of the low sky grew darker quickly; the red and green lights of the switches along the east lead at Highfield Yard blinked to life, dim and wavering under the ceaseless pelt of the rain. A white glow washed the twin streaks of the double tracked main line that ran along the north edge of the cluttered freight garden as a passenger engine came into view under reduced speed. A half mile to the east, on the approach to the White River bridge, a yellow lantern rose and swung in caution; and the passenger man, with his lighted cars trailing out behind him, answered with two barks on his whistle. The string of varnish, as the limiteds are known in railroad talk, checked to a grudging creep to enter the danger zone where the river, a swollen torrent, raced beneath the long steel bridge.

Near the door to the crew room of the squat yard office, Frank Bancroft stopped to watch through grim eyes the red marker lights on the limited's tail. He was a towering hulk, tight lipped, booted and shrouded in a long black slicker. His face, dark leather from twenty years on the cinders, was drawn and set. The tip of his cigaret glowed from savage puffs, the only outward indication of the emotion he felt in his heart.

With a gesture of defiance he tossed the cigaret away, turned and looked at the door he must now enter. It was the hardest thing that, in all his experience, he had ever been called upon to do. Beyond the door he knew he must face the men with whom he had worked and whose destinies, for the past three years, he had guided. He must face them now in a different rôle. There would be questions he couldn't answer. He didn't mind those so much. He'd do a little evading. He'd force a smile. Try to make it look as if it were nothing.

The job of facing Thomas Webb. That's where the toughest part would come. Webb, with his superior smile that was half a sneer. He'd have to watch out there—not make a move to let Webb know he was taking it so hard. He didn't want any one to know how he was taking it.

Bancroft, setting his iron jaw, pushed open the door and entered the room. The smell of rubber coats, damp from the rain, signal oil, pipe and cigaret smoke, a mixture of smells, permeated

the closeness of the air. Men turned to look at him, and his glance swept their faces. Some stood near the lockers that lined the wall. Some were adjusting the wicks in their lanterns, lighting up.

As he had feared, the questions began.

"Hey, Frank! What the hell is this?"

"What's the lowdown?"

"What's goin' on here?"

They were all facing him. Big men with big, booted feet. Switchmen. Hard handed men who played with their lives twelve hours out of every twenty-four, making up and breaking up main line freight drags and hot-shot merchandise. Fearless men who laughed in the teeth of death above rolling wheels on shunted cars in rain and sleet and snow.

Frank Bancroft raised his big right hand. His stare and his gesture, those of a man long used to command, brought the group to silence. Then he walked to the bulletin board on the wall. In its center was a fresh white notice.

"Men," he said, his voice deep and stern, "you've all read this." He indicated the new bulletin with a flourish. "You've seen the date an' the signature of John Sparling, the general yard master. This notice says that, effective at six tonight, Frank Bancroft's no longer your boss. His term of office as night yard master here at Highfield ended at ten o'clock this mornin' in John Sparling's office. Thomas Webb is on the job. I'm back in the ranks with you. Just a plain yard conductor like the rest of you. Like Webb was twenty-four hours ago. I—well, I ain't got anything more to say. You men give Webb what you gave me the last three years, an' Webb'll get along all right."

Bancroft hid his trembling hand behind his back. Then, as a moment of breathless silence greeted his statement, he walked quickly to the bench in the corner and took the oil cup from his lantern to fill it, just as he had done through the years preceding his elevation to a yard mastership.

Mike Hood, conductor of the shop yard engine, came over and clumsily laid his big hand on Bancroft's shoulder.

"What's the dope?" Mike asked, his eyes narrow. "There's somethin' damn nasty here. How come?"

Bancroft straightened. His eyes, for a moment, met those of the lean cheeked shop yard man. He shook his head.

"Nothin'," he said, evasively, straining to keep the resentment out of his voice. "Nothin', Mike. You know how it is on a railroad."

"Sure. I know how it is. But look here, Frank. For years this yard's been a nightmare. The toughest job of rawhidin'* on the pike. Then you get appointed to run it nights. You put railroadin' an' order to it. An' then, just when everything's ridin' high an' purty, we get a announcement from headquarters that's kinda taken the wind out o' the outfit. We got a right to know."

"Mike, you heard what I said about Webb," Bancroft returned grimly. "Well, you fellers just—"

"Bancroft!"

At the sharp crack of the man's name, the room became silent again. Bancroft turned from the oil bench, snapped his lantern cup into place, looked up. Webb was standing in the door, tall, heavy shouldered, dark of eye and face.

"Come in here!"

There was no kindness, no gentleness in the command. Bancroft straightened. He left his lantern and strode forward. He knew, instinctively, that every eye in the room was on him and every mind was groping for a solution to this sudden upset in the railroad scheme of things. The beat of the rain on the roof was like the roll of a muted drum, merciless and ominous.

WEBB turned and strode to his desk. Bancroft shut the door to the crew room behind him, advanced and stood waiting. His deep eyes were mere slits, and his fingers were tense and wide apart. He kept telling himself that he would have to hold on to himself. He had to watch. Webb had the upper hand, after three years of waiting.

"I don't have to tell you, Bancroft," Webb said with a sarcastic curl to one side of his lips, "that I'm sorry things had to break this way."

"Sorry?" Bancroft gave way to a grim smile. "Sorry!"

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*Rawhiding: Bitter, driving work, mostly on foot; such as climbing on and off cars and running for switches with little chance for a breathing spell.

"I'm not expectin' you to take it easy." Webb looked down his long nose at the half inch of white ash on his cigar. "I'm just askin' you one thing. You know your job. You ran a yard crew a long time before you ran this night yard. You've not forgot. But it's your tongue, Bancroft. Watch what you say."

Was there some sinister threat in that last sentence? Bancroft met the cold eyes of Webb. For a moment a fierce light blazed there.

"Webb," Frank Bancroft said after a pause, his tone charged with a deadly calm, "I'm not in the habit of takin' up my grievances with the men. My tongue, you say—my tongue's never got me in trouble yet. It's not as loose as yours."

"Oh, no?"

"As a conductor under me, Webb," Bancroft continued, his fists clenched, "you did your job. In three years of it, I never had to complain. As a conductor under you, I'll do my job. I'll do it doubly well, because, Mr. Webb, you're not foolin' me one bit. You was slated for this yard master's job when the old terminal superintendent appointed me. Sparling thought he was shoving you in. You didn't get it. For three years you've been watchin' your chance to get somethin' on me. You got it last night. You didn't lose a single chance, or a single minute. You spilled the whole thing to Sparling as soon as you could get there, an' you added to that a rotten lie."

"I'll let that pass, Bancroft," Webb shot in. "I said it'd be hard for you to take your medicine. I didn't expect anythinge else. Your tongue, I see, is already runnin' away with you. So's your mind."

"What I got to say," Bancroft barked, "I'm sayin' to your face, not to any one else. You must think I'm pretty damn dumb, not to know what you did. I know. Last night I had one of them red spot coal trains to move west to St. Louis. An' I had another train. Red spot coal. Good Lord! Plain soft coal just like any other, but under instructions to handle it like it was perishable fruit, just because some director on this pike owns the plant that the coal's consigned to, an' insists that it's gotta have preferred movement."

"I'm not interested in your troubles, Bancroft," Webb snapped. "I've got troubles of my own. Whatever happened about the coal—"

"You were concerned as hell last night," Bancroft broke in with heat. "If you hadn't been, you wouldn't 've come down from the roundhouse with a message that I'd get two engines, one at eight an' one at nine. You remember that, don't you?"

"I do," Webb retorted. "I also remember that you mumbled somethin' about takin' the first engine an' runnin' the merchandise out ahead of the coal, figgerin' on the second engine to handle the coal train. I don't see—"

"You will see, in just a second," Bancroft thundered. "You damn well neglected to tell me that the second engine wasn't heavy enough to handle the coal. The roundhouse foreman says he told you that specifically, so's I could hold the merchandise an' handle the red spot with the first jack, which was the big one. No, you didn't say a word about the difference. I didn't know anything about it till the second engine come down, an' it couldn't get the coal outta town in one piece. But you did do this, Webb. You told Sparling that you had told me, an' you made it stick. You made me out a liar, an' you got what you been layin' for. You got this job. Don't try to act like you're innocent."

"Bancroft!" Webb held up his hand and came around from behind his desk.

"You don't need to try to pull any bluffs," Bancroft shot. "You got what you want an' the next thing I know you'll be tryin' to get me off the conductors' board. That's somethin' that you an' Sparling can't do. Not without cause. I could give you cause by knockin' the teeth down your throat, but that'd be too easy. Hell, no! That's not my way. I'm here to railroad. I'll railroad till hell freezes over, an' I'm gonna stand on the side lines with the rank an' file, an' I'm gonna watch you kill yourself. You won't find no complaint against my work, rawhide like you will."

Bancroft wheeled about and strode from the presence of the new yard master whose dark face now flamed with

fury; whose fists clenched and whose small eyes held ominous threat.

IF BANCROFT expected Webb to issue him a rawhiding assignment, he was not disappointed. At 6:30, with his engine and crew, he coupled into the long string of cars in the gravel pit which was out on the freight line cut-off, a piece of track that left Highfield Yards, ran along the banks of the White River to the north of the city, crossed the stream on a long trestle and skirted the residential districts only to join the main line on the northeastern outskirts. The main line itself, double tracked, crossed the river on a steel bridge less than a mile east of the yards, ran through the Union Station and then out toward the Ohio line.

Along the banks of the swollen White, ten thousand men were working through the downpour with sandbags and gravel in an effort to hold the river in its course. Threat of flood had not been considered seriously until noon of that day, and the city had mustered the battlers after hours of valiant effort.

At six o'clock, when Frank Bancroft raised his lantern in signal to start his engine for the gravel spur, the evening newspapers over across the main line bridge issued a hurried warning to the thirty thousand dwellers of the valley, the natural bowl on the west side of the river where industrial stacks belched their smoke to the inky sky, and thousands of humble cottages were clustered on dreary streets. The valley lay below the high dump on which the main line and the Highfield classification yards were built. To the north and the south of the railroad it spread, finally thinning out in housing and population with the city dumping grounds bordering it to the west.

Frank Bancroft's family lived in the valley. Most of the Highfield switchmen had their homes there. No one was acutely aware of the flood danger because never before in history had the White River gone over its banks. But the newspapers sent the warning that if, by nine o'clock, the rise of the river had not ceased, the dwellers of the valley should hurry to safety. And the only safety lay in getting across the two city bridges to the east bank and the city proper. The Washington Street and Oliver Avenue bridges were the means of exit. The extras were carried by men on bicycles and hurled on front porches. They were not sold.

And if that warning had been heeded, Frank Bancroft might not have done what he did. But never before had the White come to an acute flood stage. And being human, the dwellers of the valley read the hundred and twenty point headlines on the papers and decided they'd stick to the last.

Frank Bancroft hooked to his gravel cars, loaded with thousands of tons of sand in bags—loaded by a sweating army, hollow eyed and drenched, grim and bearded in the glow of many torches. He saw the last man on board and signaled his engineer. The wheels of the gondolas screeched in protest, but the engine yanked them out and up to the cut-off tracks.

Up in the engine cab, resting for a space from the beat of the rain, Bancroft stood silent at his engineer's side. The engineer at first tried to draw from Bancroft the reason for his return to the ranks of the men, but Bancroft evaded the questions, smoked his cigaret savagely and tried to center his mind on the work at hand.

The cars moved off the cut-off and into the yard under the frantic signaling of a lamp at the lead switch. As the engine labored under its tonnage over the points, Frank Bancroft dropped to the ground to be at the switch for the reverse movement that would back the sandbags down toward the bridge and then into an industrial spur where the feverish unloading would begin.

"What the hell's the matter with you men?" Webb bawled from the inky darkness, his face tense in the dim reflection of the lantern he held. "There's no time to lose. Get that engineer into action!"

Webb giving orders. Webb shouting. Bancroft turned to him, his visage ugly, his eyes aflame.

"Keep on your shirt," he retorted curtly. "We got a slippery rail. You know that. If you don't you ought to. An' don't bawl at me. We'll keep these

cars movin'. You do your stuff in keepin' tracks open for us."

Without waiting for Webb's reply he turned on his heel, swung his lantern in a wide washout sign to stop. Then he threw over the switch, and made a full arm circle with his light. The engine responded in a backup movement, and Bancroft crawled aboard and skinned to the top of the rear car.

Backing into an industrial spur that gave closest access to the river's banks, the grim army of men aboard the gondolas, some with slickers, some in their shirt sleeves, got into action. While some stayed on the cars and dumped the sandbags overboard, others formed in teams of twos and began carrying the bags, one at a time, up the steep incline to the top of the levee.

Gasoline torches flared, hoarse shouts filled the air. Frank Bancroft forgot for a moment his grievances. He called one of his brakemen and they each grabbed a bag. Straining, blowing like a leaky engine on a grade, they staggered and slipped under their burdens, made the top and dropped their bags where others were dropping them.

"If that bank busts," the panting flagman said as he paused for a moment with Bancroft to get his breath, "if it busts—it'll flood that valley in—in a hour. Look! Look there!"

Bancroft followed his flagman's pointing finger. The raging torrent was almost up to where their feet were planted. The roar was terrific. Bancroft's eyes widened. On the swirl of the current, reflected in the dim light of the torches, he saw the outlines of a shed half torn apart. A section of shingled roof, turning round and round like a crazy raft.

"Look! A horse! Look!"

The shout was echoed back and forth among the watchers and the workers who had paused to watch. Bancroft saw it and shuddered. He saw the white of the distended eyes, the frantic efforts of the animal to gain the shore. Then the horse was lost in the rush of the flood and the darkness beyond the swirling circle.

Other débris came down. A rocking chair. Something that looked like the end of a wooden bed. Bancroft stood like a man in a trance. He didn't realize that his boot soles were under water, nor did he see the slow trickle at his very ankles. He was thinking of his family, wondering.

"Good Lord! Run! It's over! It's got—"

Bancroft saw the man fall even as his feet got into motion. Not three feet from where he stood he saw the break in the riverbank, a sudden cascade, a human form rolling over and over down toward where the cars stood.

"She's over, men!" It was Bancroft who was shouting now. "Climb those cars. Quick!"

HE RACED along shouting as he went. There was a mad scramble. The man who went down the bank in the swirl of water was climbing a car to safety. It wouldn't do to wait too long. He had to get those cars out of there and back to the main line dump. He wondered about the thousands of others ranged along the bank out of his sight and the sound of his voice. Men, like himself, with families. Then he gave his full attention to his own responsibilities. In a way it was every man for himself.

The water was almost to the axles of the wheels, spreading itself over the valley floor when Frank Bancroft gave his engine the sign to take 'em away. He crawled on the front of the engine and rode up the spur to the main line switch where he saw the switch tender running toward him.

"Webb! He wants you on the phone!" The switch tender, shouting, clawed at Bancroft's arm. He pulled at the big conductor. "Quick!"

Bancroft reached the instrument and shouted into it.

"I just got a message," Webb's cold tones came over the wire, "that the river's busted over at the Washington Street bridge. Leave your cars where you are an' bring your engine to the yards. I got another gravel train lined up to send—"

"Gravel, hell!" Bancroft snorted. "The river's rushin' in on the valley now. What you gotta do is get the coach yard at the Union Station to get a couple engines over here with passenger cars. All

hell ain't gonna keep this valley safe now."

"You do what I say, Bancroft," Webb thundered. "I'm runnin' this show."

"An' I'm tellin' you," Bancroft retorted, "I'm bringin' in my cars an' a load of men."

Without waiting to explain further, he slammed the receiver in place, opened the main line switch and got his engine under way. He puffed up the westward track against a red semaphore at the cut-off junction to find a coal drag blocking him out. He held his lantern close and cursed under his breath.

"Red spot stuff," he said bitterly as he saw the cards that were tacked on the cars. The coal that had to have special handling because it belonged to a cockeyed director of the road who probably had callouses on his thumbs. Coal that had right over everything but perishable. It had caused the mess that had put him back in the ranks.

He spat viciously at one of the high sided hoppers, plunged along with his head down against the rain to see what was holding the coal in his way.

He came into an ugly picture. Webb, hatless, was rushing around like a man gone mad. A main line conductor was making comments about certain brainless gentlemen who were charged with the responsibility of running a yard and remarking that he didn't care if the coal stayed there all night. He was on overtime as it was, and he'd get terminal detention pay. Let somebody laugh that off. Webb was in no laughing mood. He was frothing at the mouth and waving his hands and arms.

Old at the game, a master of railroad strategy, Bancroft listened with a half smile of contempt. The main line west of the yards was blocked by two incoming drag freights that couldn't get into the yards. Since the double track ended up there at the tower, the coal couldn't make a move.

"Where the hell's Bancroft?" the main line conductor drawled. "Bancroft drunk an' blindfolded couldn't stir up a tangle like this."

"Right here's Bancroft," the conductor from the gravel cars spoke up, "an' I got a dozen cars down here loaded with half drowned citizens that I took outta the flood. What you gonna do about it, Webb?"

The new yardmaster turned in seething fury.

"Go back where your engine is an' stay there till I send for you."

He blurted out the order, gesticulating with his lantern.

The engineer on the coal train evidently took the motion for a signal. He whistled off and started up, and Bancroft, seeing what would happen in further messing up the picture by getting afoul of the lead tracks, took the situation in hand and swung a signal to stop. The coal engineer complied before he had turned half a wheel.

If Webb was about to burst forth in a new torrent of savage railing, he never got to it. A loud wail filled the night. The unmistakable shriek of a fire siren. First one, then two, then what might have been dozens.

A frightened yard clerk came from the office, his eyes wide, his face pale.

"Mr. Webb," he yelled, "the phone! They called on the phone. They're bringin'—"

"Who called on the phone?" Webb thundered.

"The police. The station in the valley. The fire trucks. They're bringin' out people. Bringin' 'em to the yards. Gotta get 'em across the river to town. The water's risin' in the streets. They said to tell you."

A sudden panic gripped Bancroft. His family. The families of others. For a moment he stood breathless. Across the river—the yard clerk's words.

Without waiting to ask more, Frank Bancroft raced for the yard office and didn't know that Webb was two steps behind him. Bancroft grabbed the city telephone and put a call through for the precinct captain.

"They say," Bancroft shouted, "you're bringin' out the people in the valley. Bringin' 'em to the yards. What's the matter with the Oliver Avenue an' Washington Street bridges?"

"We told you," the voice on the wire said. "We explained that the Washington Street bridge was out on the west bank an' the Oliver Avenue was buckled in the middle. We gotta get 'em up to your yards."

"You say you got—"

Rough hands grabbed Bancroft by the collar. He half turned in the yard master's swivel and saw Webb, his face flushed with rage, towering over him.

"Gimme that phone," Webb commanded.

He gave a healthy jerk and the swivel crashed backward. Bancroft dropped the instrument and got to his feet. He gave Webb a vicious shove and whirled on the yard clerk.

"Get the coach yard office," Bancroft ordered, "an' get 'em quick."

"You get to hell outta this," Webb bellowed.

He walked in and took the instrument from the frightened clerk's fingers. Switchmen and others had by now crowded into the door.

Bancroft tried to explain about the street bridges. Webb gave him a glare that perhaps was intended to silence him. Bancroft was not to be silenced. His big hand closed over the telephone instrument and he wrenched it from Webb's grasp. It wasn't a moment for personal animosity. A move had to be made quickly. Thousands of people rushing toward this yard. They had to be taken care of.

He placed the instrument to his lips and called for the coach yard. Webb made a pass to take the transmitter from him. Bancroft's big hand reached out. The wet palm of his glove fell smack on Webb's nose and the shove had enough force to send the yard master crashing back against the water cooler.

Then the coach yard was on and Bancroft spat his instructions.

"How about that bridge?" the man at the coach yard bawled. "Will it hold an engine an' cars?"

"You get 'em started," Bancroft retorted. "There's track walkers at the bridge. They're watchin' things. They ain't said the bridge wasn't safe."

"How many cars?"

"All you got." Bancroft slammed the receiver to its hook and turned savagely about. Webb was advancing on him, his face dark with fierce anger.

"Now, you!" Bancroft barked at his superior. "Listen to me! This ain't my job. It's yours. But you act like you don't know what to do with it. I'm makin' a suggestion. It's the only way out as I see. You can take it or leave it. An' remember, there's plenty witnesses in here to what I'm tellin' you, Webb."

"Suggest an' be damned," Webb bawled. "If you knew so much, you'd be givin' the orders an' I'd be takin' 'em. Clear out!"

"Listen, Webb!" Bancroft grabbed the other man by the wrist. "This ain't no time for scrappin'." His mouth was a grim line, his eyes burning pools. "Right now there's human bein's comin' into the yard expectin' us to do somethin' for 'em. My family. The families of these other men. I know what we can do. I'm tellin' you. I'm not wantin' your authority. I'm only—"

"There's the door," Webb shouted. "When I want somethin' from you, I'll ask for it. You clear outta this room or I'll throw you out."

They glared at each other. The mob now assembled suddenly seemed to grasp the grim situation. Thousands of people needing help. Two men deadlocked on what move to make because one would not listen. Bancroft's hands were trembling. Moments were precious. Then Bancroft threw caution away. His head came up. He addressed the switchmen and conductors who had crowded round.

"Since the yard master's yellow," he spat, "I'm takin' the bit. Mike!" He picked out the lean face of the shop yard conductor. "Take your engine an' shove the cars in No. 1 track as far in as you can. Clear me an alley."

"Stay where you are, Mike," Webb thundered. He wheeled on Bancroft. "As for you, I'm pullin' you outta service right now. You said we got witnesses. They'll have a nice story to tell in Sparling's office tomorrow."

"Let 'em tell," Bancroft said. "Tomorrow I won't give a damn. Now we gotta work fast. Come with me, you men."

Bancroft started to the door. The others turned to follow him. Webb intercepted him, grabbed his arm. Bancroft made a motion to brush Webb off. The motion had force behind it and for the second time Webb was hurled

against the water cooler. The glass jar toppled over. Webb staggered clear of it and came at Bancroft with fists flying.

A hard smash to the jaw rocked Bancroft on his feet. His temper snapped. Blinding rage welled up in his heart, motivated the piston plunges of his steel-like arms.

He couldn't do anything else. If he had to put Webb out of the way in order to restore system to Highfield, he could do it. Tomorrow! That would be another day. Tonight it was the flood, and the White River bridge.

Blood spurted from a gash in Bancroft's cheek. He tasted it as it spattered to his lips. He struck out savagely, felt the impact of his fist with the wall of Webb's chest. The yard master gave a grunt. As he caved in at the knees, Bancroft's left caught him on the mouth, snapped back his head, sent him sprawling.

Breathless, half staggering, Bancroft saw the hulk of Webb sprawled out. He brushed his hand over the blood on his mouth and turned on the silent watchers.

"Now," he shouted, "we'll move!"

HE SNATCHED up his lantern and hurled orders as he ran. The shop yard engine had No. 1 track clear within five minutes. Men, women and children, some clutching treasured trinkets, came piling into the yard, refugees from the flood. Two crews had to keep them huddled together near the office and out of the way of the movement of engines and cars.

With No. 1 track clear, Bancroft crawled up to the cab of the main line engine that had hold of the coal—four thousand tons of it—and yelled:

"Pull up that No. 1 track until you see my signal. I'm backin' you down on the westbound main, against the current of traffic. When I say back up, you keep comin'."

"But this here coal ain't supposed to back up," the main line man said. "It's supposed to move to St. Louis. Forward."

"You do as I say," Bancroft bellowed, and the engineer, with a shrug, got under way.

Bancroft watched the loaded hoppers roll by. Finally, when the caboose came up to the switch where he stood, he gave the sign to stop. Already two switchmen were lining up the switches which would allow the coal to back over the main line cross-overs and get on to the westward stem.

Within less than a minute the coal, caboose and all, was backing down. Bancroft climbed to the top of the hack and swung wide circles to the distant engine.

He gave a sign to take it easy as the rear end of the drag approached the bridge. Finally, just at the end of the bridge, he stopped his train. He climbed down to make a minute inspection. The track walker on duty came scrambling up to him.

"You oughtn't to take no train out there, mister," the track walker said. "I talked to the general yard master on the phone about this bridge, an' they're gettin' a engineer down to look at it. Mr. Sparling gave me orders not to let nothin' on till the engineer got here."

"He did, eh?"

Bancroft was looking at the approach. The water was smashing at it, but was not yet over it. The railroad bridge, higher than either of the street bridges, was not yet awash. With the flood pouring over the banks in two or three places, it was doubtful if the river would ever rise to the ties. Bancroft looked at the track walker.

"Well, you call Mr. Sparling. You tell him Bancroft's taken four thousand tons of coal on to this bridge an' blockin' the west bound main. You tell him I'm puttin' the coal there to hold the damn thing in place. If the flood can move that coal, all right. If not, the coal can hold the bridge for traffic. You tell him that."

He left the track walker staring. Climbing aloft, he repeated his circular signal. One by one the eighty-ton hoppers rolled out above the surging torrent, and Bancroft, with breathless intensity, leaned over and watched.

The bridge held true. If the under structure had been weakened, he could see and feel no evidence of it. He didn't know a thing about river engineering, but thousands of tons of red spot coal,

highly preferred coal, if you please, ought to do the trick of giving ballast.

Bancroft swung the sign to stop as the car on which he was perched reached the east end of the structure. Then he crawled down to the ground and raced a block and a half to a shanty that served to house a switch tender who guarded a cross-over switch.

Without explanation, he grabbed the company telephone and called the house yard. Had the coaches for Highfield left? One was leaving right now? One train of 'em? O. K.

Bancroft waited at the switch and flagged down the engine as it approached. The coaches were brought to a halt and he started to climb aboard the jack when he saw an official looking man swing down and peer at him.

"These cars can't cross that bridge unless I can determine the safety of it," the man said, and introduced himself as the chief terminal engineer.

"I already done that," Bancroft replied, and he explained his move.

"Great heaven!" The engineer frowned. "Let's see."

The engine with the passenger cars crossed over to the eastward main, and approached the bridge against the current of traffic. Here the engineer got out and, with Bancroft, walked the full length of the structure over the ties. The roar of the water below them was terrific, but it was at least three feet from touching the bottom of the ties. Neither man spoke until they had reached the other side.

"Well, what do you say?" Bancroft demanded.

"Give 'em a highball," the terminal chief engineer shot back. "Good Lord!"

The rescue work on the part of the railroad that stormy night marks one of the brilliant pages in the railroad history of the Middle West. And in the midst of it all Bancroft stood heedless of the rain, heedless of the shouting, the crying.

He directed every move that was made. Long lines of empty coaches continued to run out from Union Station to be loaded with the refugees and carried back across the White River. Bancroft gave up his slicker to cover the wasted form of an old woman who was carried into the yard on a stretcher, and who had to wait for a fresh string of cars to arrive. He gave his coat to another to help shield a babe in arms from the storm. Somewhere he'd lost his hat.

Head and shoulders above the rescue work he towered, a grim, dark faced man who put duty and service above everything else. As to his own family he had no word. He hoped his family was safe.

Nor did he pause when daylight struggled through the black masses of rain clouds. He kept driving, efficiently, capably. What had happened to Webb he didn't know. He didn't see him again through all those fretful hours.

It was not until eight o'clock, when the last of more than thirty thousand people had been transported across the White River bridge, that Bancroft thought of himself, and that thought was, "Good Lord! I must be gettin' old."

He found himself about to collapse from exhaustion and exposure. He waved a sign to the last of the shuttle trains, and staggered toward the yard office. His knees seemed unable to support him.

"Take it easy, Bancroft!"

The voice had a ring of authority. He turned to see an official countenance, pink and glowing.

"Easy, old man!"

Another hand had taken his left arm. He tried to say something but couldn't. Things became a little vague. He remembered going into the yard office and sinking into a chair. He remembered having taken a poke at Webb. The chair felt good. The warmth of the office felt really magnificent. Then the chill swept over him—a chill that shook him violently. Darkness.

IN railroading there are no medals, no decorations. A man risks his life in the line of duty, and it's all in a day's work. Sometimes a man goes beyond the line of duty and there's a mention of it in the papers. A paragraph. Maybe two. Only sometimes.

Within the railroad family, however, such deeds are not overlooked or forgotten, especially when the officers are

of the old line—men who've come up from the cinders and haven't forgotten that they, too, once wore overalls and carried a lantern.

Frank Bancroft came out of the hospital long after the flood in the valley had been cleared away, and the rebuilding of humble cottages was in progress. He came out with the ravages of pneumonia stamped upon him; thirty pounds lighter, but well. He was taken in an automobile to a large hotel where, after greeting his assembled family, he was asked to step into another room.

Three men rose to greet him. One, he remembered. The man with the pink face who'd taken his arm that day. The general manager. The others were introduced. The general superintendent and the vice-president of operations. They shook hands and the general manager helped Bancroft to a seat.

"Well, Bancroft," the general manager said gruffly. He was a man who'd twisted a brake club himself one time. "We won't bother you long. Just want to say a few words of appreciation for what you did for the people and the railroad. Chief engineer tells me if you hadn't put the coal where you did, the bridge would have gone sure as hell. Words—I'm no speaker myself. Damn nuisance trying to say what we feel."

"Oh, that's all right," Bancroft replied. "I—I didn't do much. I'm sorry I did what I had to in the yard office. Guess you know about me startin' a mutiny. Wish I could see Webb an' tell him so."

"You'll have that opportunity," the general manager said. "Webb lost a couple teeth, but I made him talk to me. Had a talk with Sparling, too. You won't see him soon in case you got any more apologies to pass out. That's why we're here to see you today."

Bancroft's eyes widened. He saw the general manager look over at the vice-president. The vice-president brought a folded paper from his pocket and the general manager took it.

"Damn nuisance," he said, "trying to make speeches. Here, Bancroft. Take this. It's a carbon copy. Read it when you feel strong enough. We better get out of here now. And thanks again."

In a semi-daze Bancroft shook each man's hand. Then they passed through the door into the hall. He held the folded paper, half fearing to open it. He sank into a chair by the window, fumbled around and finally smoothed the paper out. The general manager said he'd had a talk with Sparling and with Webb. The general manager had been in the mob at the yards.

Slowly Bancroft dropped his eyes to the typing. He read the first line and hunched forward. His eyes widened slightly and he read faster. Then he looked up and stared for a long time over the roofs beyond, his great fists clenching, his smile broadening.

On that day, throughout the terminal, a fresh notice went on the bulletin boards. In Highfield yard office a group clustered about and read:

> Effective at once, Frank Bancroft, former night yard master at Highfield, is appointed, in recognition of extraordinary services during the White River flood disaster, to the post of General Yard Master. Mr. Bancroft relieves John Sparling who has been transferred to duties at St. Louis.

The notice, a copy of which had been left in Bancroft's hands, was signed by the general manager, and down in the corner was the signature of the vice-president of operations, in approval.

LOYALTIES

By JAMES W. BENNETT

POMMEROY'S heavy jowls became deep purple and his eyes, above their bags, clouded with blood as he stared at the curt chit written in Chinese:

> We shall call upon you at noon today. You will turn over to us the three million taels of customs money you have collected for the Port of Tientsin this year.
>
> —LOYAL SOCIETY OF BLINDING JUSTICE

Phrases seethed in his mind: blackmailing scoundrels! Jejune Chinese reformers!

"Loyal!" he muttered aloud. "Loyal to what? To their own pocketbooks!"

Then the heavy flush of anger ebbed. This thing was serious. He had heard that the rebellion, initiated by the members of this junta, was spreading, but he had had no intimation of its reaching as far north as Tientsin. They were declaring war upon Manchuria, upon the Chinese war lord at Mukden who controlled Tientsin. Upon him, Pommeroy, customs collector of the Port since he had been appointed by that same Manchurian *Tuchun.*

"So, all they want is three million taels! Three million—just like that! They know very little about me, if they think they can move *me* with their threats! Their slogans of sacrifice! They forget that I, too, have made sacrifices for China. I've dedicated my life to China."

He sighed with a certain melancholy at the thought. His hand touched the carved front of his desk in an absent minded caress. A fine bit of Chinese cabinet making, that desk. Its panels had originally come from a set of ancestral altar tables. His eye strayed to the wall. A scroll with ideographs painted by "Old Buddha"—the last empress dowager—occupied a place of honor on the wall. Beneath the scroll, on a blackwood stand, was a bowl of celadon. All these had come from the Imperial palaces. Mementos of the Boxer siege of Peking—and its aftermath. Pommeroy had been through the siege.

Vague memories stirred within him as he stared at these Oriental *objets de vertu.* He recalled how, with scores of other foreigners—after the lifting of the siege—he had burst into courtyard after courtyard of the Peking palaces, looting. There had been a fat, ridiculous eunuch who had tried, bare handed, to guard this scroll and those altar tables. Thirty-one busy years had passed since the siege, but he could still remember the eunuch's thin, falsetto scream when faced with death. The man hadn't possessed a vestige of that admirable Chinese stoicism. What rascals those eunuchs had been! Avid, thievish, without honor! Loyal only to one person: that old harridan, the empress dowager! Yet the palace emasculate had refused to move, and Pommeroy's cavalry sword had run him through.

Pommeroy, himself, was fat now. His Chinese cook had prepared many a buttered pheasant since those six weeks of beleaguered starvation that had so electrified the world. His No. 1 boy had uncorked many a bottle of the Widow Cliquot and of Chambertin—not in as good shape, of course, as if the wine had lain in some cool cellar in Paris. But there were hardships in connection with

life in China.

Thanks to that opportunity to loot, he had laid the foundation of a modest fortune. Two vanloads of jade and ivory, porcelain and silk, he had shipped to America. After all, that was small enough recompense for the grilling, fear-sweating six weeks of the siege.

Since that time, Pommeroy had faithfully served this land of his adoption. He had been political adviser to a dozen administrations since the republic began. New governments, inimical to the ones that preceded, had retained him, because he was a wizard at collecting taxes. Pommeroy could tell to a single copper cash just how much a war torn province would stand—without breaking into bitter, goaded revolt. To each administration he had been stanchly loyal.

He jerked himself free of these rather pleasant tentacles of memory, to glance apprehensively at the wide window opening upon a courtyard. The catch was insecure. But, after all, those reformers couldn't get into the court. The gate was guarded with soldiers from the customs staff, all loyal to him. That deep loyalty of wages unpaid. If he were killed, they wouldn't get a single doongpeh of pay. Always keep the Chinese in debt to you—

There was a queer, splitting sound at the window. The wood of the casement was old, dried out. Pommeroy's hand groped in the desk. His fingers closed over the butt of a revolver. He had been a fine shot, once. Now, his hand was shaking.

The window was jerked open and a head appeared in the aperture. The Chinese face was calm, the face of a dreamer, a poet. Only the dark, narrow eyes were alive, flaming. The intruder looked without blinking at the point of the revolver.

Pommeroy pulled the trigger. The Oriental swayed. The eyes became weary, then blank. The splintered frame of the window was empty.

"There!" said Pommeroy feverishly. "That'll teach 'em! They *will* try to interfere with me and my duty! Try to make me turn over money that isn't mine—"

He felt a queer, pricking sensation between his shoulder blades. Still facing the window, his hand brushed behind him. A stern voice spoke in Chinese:

"Do not move, miserable man. It is the point of a sword that you feel. One motion with that pistol in your hand and this point will run you through. Now listen well. On your desk is a Bank of China checkbook. You will make out a check to The Society of Blinding Justice. A check for three million taels—the money you were going to send north to that tyrant, that wild beast who is drinking China's blood, the Wolf of Mukden. Sign!"

Pommeroy could feel the tip of the sword begin to bite. No, he would not sign! It was not his money! He was only the collector, the agent! During all these years, he had never taken a penny which was not rightfully his. That was why the Chinese *tuchuns* had trusted him.

The voice went on:

"You have just killed one of our men. But in spite of that, we shall spare your life—if you sign. Money we must have, to fight that blood-sucking vampire of the north."

The pain had become exquisite now. Pommeroy gasped. His fingers fumbled for the checkbook and the pain lessened. Then he pushed the pad away from him.

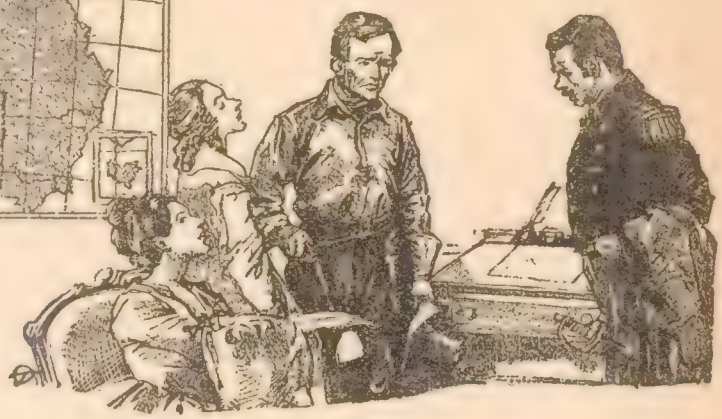
"No!" he suddenly shouted, his voice cracking, yet stubborn. "No."

The bite of the sword increased. From Pommeroy's dewlapped throat came a thin falsetto scream. Like that palace eunuch during the looting of Peking, he possessed not a vestige of that admirable Chinese stoicism in the face of death.

The sword thrust its way relentlessly on—through his fat, all but emasculated, body.

By

WM. MacLEOD RAINE



Continuing

The BROAD ARROW

The Story Thus Far:

WHEN the small boat came alongside the prison ship *Success*, anchored in Sydney harbor, Captain Henry Killough made a frantic effort to get the convict, John Haxon, flogged almost to insensibility at his orders, below decks. He was too late. As she came over the side, Victoria Day, the reigning beauty of Sydney, looked into the hate filled eyes of Haxon, cried in a horror stricken voice, "Geoffrey Blake!" and fell fainting to the deck. As Mary McQueen went to the assistance of her friend, she thought it strange that Victoria should call this felon by the name of the man with whom she had once been in love in England—before he dropped mysteriously from sight.

The next morning Killough was prepared for Victoria's father—a major on the Australian convict labor board. To his questions about Haxon, Killough explained that he was the most dangerous man in his charge—deported for murder. More often than any other he had to be dragged to the whipping rack for disciplining.

Major Day wasn't altogether satisfied, and saw Haxon privately. The convict denied he was Geoffrey Blake, and swore that some day he would pay Killough off for his brutalities. To safeguard against possible trouble, Major Day had Haxon transferred to McQuirk's station in the interior, which lay near the home of Mary McQueen.

Laying his plans carefully, Haxon succeeded in escaping one night with two chosen companions—Burke and Robbins. On the best mounts in Major McQuirk's stable they made off into the bush, after wounding McQuirk. Then Haxon was seen no more until one day he rode up to the station of Jim Stuart, a friend of Mary McQueen's, who knew something of Haxon's story. He recognized the man who in a few short weeks had made himself even more famous a bushranger than the legendary Jewboy and the murderous Jack Lynch. He was filled with apprehension when Haxon took nothing more than a full supply of ammunition.

Three days later Haxon's gang rode up to the bank in Parametta. Robbins was stationed in the doorway, while Haxon lounged up and thrust himself between the manager and a young woman with whom he was talking. At sound of the outlaw's voice the girl whirled—and John Haxon stood face to face with Mary McQueen. She screamed—and Robbins's gun roared. The shot, meant for a bolting clerk, struck the girl in the shoulder. Forced now to work at top speed, Haxon looted the bank vault, sent word for a doctor—and galloped away through a roaring lane of gunfire.

Safe in the bush once more, Haxon was leading his men toward their hideout when they came across an unconscious wretch pegged out. Revived, the man said his name was Jones—that the outlaw, Jack Lynch, was responsible for his plight. Then, as if seeing Haxon for the first time, Jones paled and his eyes stared wildly. And it flashed over Haxon at the same instant that he had seen this man somewhere before.

Abruptly it all came back to him: Jones was the man he had seen watching him with furtive eyes that day in the English court when Henry Killough falsely testified that he had seen Haxon issuing from the house of one Mullin, for whose murder Geoffrey Blake, alias John Haxon—Henry Killough's cousin—had been deported for life.

Grimly Haxon studied the man.

"Now," he said ominously, "you will tell me the whole truth or here you stay. Maybe a second miracle will save you."

HAXON turned and walked to his horse. He swung into the saddle.

The bound man pleaded piteously.

"Don't leave me. I'll tell everything. Gawd, I've wanted to tell it for years. But go easy on me, gov'nor, if I do."

Without dismounting, Haxon waited. The confession of Jones burst from him in a rush of words.

"I never saw Killough before the night he killed Mullin. The old woman and me were in the same lodging house as this Mullin, the room next to his. There was a door between his room and ours. When the quarreling began we listened. I watched through the keyhole."

"You mean the quarreling between Killough and Mullin?"

"Yes. I didn't know either of 'em."

"What were they quarreling about?"

"This Mullin knew something about the captain—how he robbed his uncle of money and laid it on his cousin. He'd been putting the screws on Killough—getting money out of him—said he'd peach if the captain didn't give him another fifty pounds. Killough claimed he was bled white."

"Go on."

"Killough lost his temper. Mullin backed off. From the keyhole I couldn't see him then. Killough cried out, 'You would, you devil,' and jumped for Mullin. We heard a kind of scream, and then a gasp. Some one cried out, sort of low, 'My God, I've done it!' Killough rose and looked around the room, wild-like. He noticed the door between the rooms, then walked to it and opened it to make sure nobody was in the next room. He caught me rising from the keyhole."

"And had to divvy with you to keep your mouth shut. I'd call that rather good. He gets rid of one blackmailer and picks up another the same moment." Haxon's laughter was not pleasant to hear.

"Truth is, he frightened the old woman and me," Jones went on. "He's a bad un, Captain Killough is, and he was desperate that night. It was shut up, or go the same way Mullin had gone. We took what he offered to keep mum. But s'help me, gov'nor, I didn't know then he meant to lay it on you. I swear I didn't. He didn't know it himself. He must have thought that out afterward when he saw you on the street with his girl. When I knew what he'd done I sweated blood. So did my old woman. But we couldn't tell then. He had us. He swore he'd lay it on us and hang us both if we squawked. And he'd have done it, too. The missis and me, we were fair bowled over when it went so hard against you. And Killough had us where we couldn't lift a hand."

Haxon untied the rope.

"I'm going to take you with me to a magistrate. You'll make a signed confession before him. If you welsh on me I'll shoot you through the head and ride away. That plain?"

"They'll take me back to England and I'll be scragged," Jones whined. "And I hadn't any more to do with it than you had, mister."

"Where's your wife?" Haxon asked.

"The old woman's in Sussex with her sister. I've been saving up to get her out here."

"So you may yet. We'll get a deposition from her. If she backs you up, I daresay you'll go clear. If not, it will be a comfort to you that you deserve to be hanged."

The bushranger dismounted and freed his captive.

"You'll have to walk to Willoughby Bar," Haxon told the man. "It's not more than three or four miles. If I tried to put you on behind me my horse would go to buck-jumping. You good for the walk? We'll take it easy."

At Willoughby Bar they found the other bushrangers waiting for them. Already Wirra had a fire going. From a pannikin rose the savory odor of a stew. The river was a sandy bed as dry on the surface as a lime kiln. But Burke and Robbins had got water by tramping their horses up and down until the moisture oozed through the packed sands.

A kangarooer dropped into camp and had dinner with them. No doubt he guessed shrewdly who they were, but he

asked no questions and no information was offered. After he had gone Haxon drew his two companions to one side.

"Wait for me at the wurleys in the gap," he told them. "I may be away two or three days, perhaps longer."

"Right you are, Cap'n," Robbins said.

Haxon took the packhorse as a mount for Jones.

CHAPTER XV

FIVE HUNDRED, DEAD OR ALIVE

JAMES STUART was writing the checks for his sheep shearers when he became aware that some one was standing in the doorway. He looked up, to meet a surprise that was a shock. Haxon was smiling down at him. Another man stood beside the bushranger, but him the squatter did not give a second glance. He was an entirely negligible person.

"The bad penny back again," John Haxon said.

"Brought your gang with you this time, eh?" Stuart answered coldly. "I suppose you're sticking up the station?"

The bushranger ignored the second question.

"Don't insult my gang. They're not sweeps like this," he replied.

"No? The worst they do is to shoot young ladies."

Haxon passed over the sarcasm.

"Miss McQueen is doing well, I hope," he said.

"It's not your fault she is still living."

"I asked you how seriously Miss McQueen was wounded."

"The doctor says she just escaped being badly wounded. We'll not discuss Miss McQueen if you please."

"Except to say that no harm was intended her. My boys are decent ruffians."

The squatter lifted his eyebrows.

"Did you say decent?"

"I said decent ruffians. Don't confuse them with Lynch's scalawags, please."

"Your villains draw a line somewhere?"

"Or I draw it for them," Haxon corrected. "It takes a certain finesse to be a successful bushranger. One has to make friends, and as few enemies as possible. Because he hasn't brains enough to understand this, Lynch will be shot or hanged within a few months."

Stuart looked him over slowly.

"You're a hardy scamp. I'll say that for you. Seen this, by the way?"

He picked up and tossed across the table a printed poster.

"Just got it by post," he went on. "I'm to tack it up in a conspicuous place."

Haxon reached for the paper and read:

£500

Reward for the Capture of John Haxon

DEAD OR ALIVE

This notorious bushranger stuck up the Parametta bank, seriously wounding a young lady during the raid. An escaped government man, he is a desperate character and will probably not be taken without a struggle. Age 25. Stands six feet in his stockings and is very powerfully built. Dark hair and eyes. Moves gracefully. Is usually dressed in best tailored riding clothes.

* * *

£50

Reward each for the capture of Pat Burke and Philip Robbins alive. Both are escaped government men and are members of the Haxon gang. Thought to have been in the Parametta robbery. Burke speaks with Irish accent. Medium height, slender, blue eyes. Laughs frequently, showing white teeth. 28 years old. Robbins is heavyset, inclined to sullenness. Very dark from sun. Eyes brown. Approximately 40 years old. Is an old sundowner who knows the bush.

* * *

Nota bene. A suitable reward will be paid for information leading to the arrest of any or all of these outlaws.

The placard was signed by the governor of the colony.

"Five hundred pounds dead or alive," Haxon repeated. "I'm getting to be an important citizen. Why don't you do something about it? Come, Mr. Stuart, take a sporting chance. Five hundred pounds is a tidy pick-up. With a bit of luck you might gather it in. When you meet this Haxon, if you ever do, just tell him to bail up and then drive him

to the nearest constable. You'd be surprised how easily men can be persuaded to stick up their hands."

Stuart relaxed a little. He had had a talk with Mary McQueen and had gathered that she had been shot by mistake and that Haxon had been as decent about it afterward as could have been expected.

"Sounds easy to hear you tell it," the squatter said. "But I'd need a bit of luck, wouldn't I?"

"You'd have to take him dead, not alive. I daresay he'd take some killing too. A desperate character, this poster calls him."

Stuart leaned back in his chair and grinned. It was curious how contact with this man seemed to make his nostrils breathe adventure. It was a strange mental reaction in him, who had always been scrupulously honest, that he felt an odd sense of comradeship with the bushranger. The fellow's business was sordid enough. He lived by stealing what other men earned. Why then should he admire Haxon because of his pluck, audacity and ease of manner? It was a weakness of course, but he could not help it.

"I'd earn my money," Stuart admitted. "Of course some one will get him one of these days."

"Oh, yes," the bushranger agreed lightly. "Good riddance, too."

"And now, Mr. Haxon, if you haven't come to bail up the station, may I ask you why you are here?" the squatter inquired.

"I'm here to ask another favor of you."

"If it's ammunition you want I'll be damned if I give it to you, not unless you shoot me down or tie me up first. I haven't forgotten what you did with the last you got here."

"Something altogether different this time. It really isn't a favor. You're a magistrate, aren't you?"

"Yes." Stuart was filled with curiosity, but he restrained it long enough to offer hospitality. "By the way, would you like a drink?"

"I never touch it," Haxon answered. "It's bad for my business."

Without looking at him, Stuart nodded toward Jones.

"Your friend perhaps might like a drop."

"He's not my friend," the bushranger said. "And while he's with me he's not drinking."

"You're an apostle of temperance, Mr. Haxon?"

"Not for the public at large."

"I remember you do smoke. Have a cheroot."

The owner of the station pushed a box of them across the table.

Haxon helped himself to one and lighted it, an eye on Stuart all the time.

"Mr. Jones doesn't smoke—in the company of his betters," he explained. "The fact is, Mr. Stuart, that he is in a sad state of mind. He has a conscience, and it has been troubling him. We've decided to come here and relieve it."

STUART took a good look at Jones, who did not meet his eye. There was a settled air of depression about the man. He had the manner of one who had been unhappy for some time and had become resigned to it.

"His conscience gives him bad dreams and distresses him. So we had a little talk, he and I, and we've decided it would be better to confess his crime. He wants it all properly signed, sealed and attested. Isn't that what you want, Jones?"

The question was a derisive one. Stuart did not know what was the relationship between these two men, but he knew the weaker one was bending to the compulsion of the stronger.

Jones swore weakly. His furtive eyes slid over the squatter and dropped to the floor. He mumbled what might be taken for an assent.

"What does he want to confess?" Stuart asked.

"A little matter of murder. The thing was actually done by a friend of his."

"No friend of mine," Jones demurred sulkily.

"If this is to be a legal confession I'd better have another witness or two here," the Scotchman said.

"Yes," the bushranger assented, after a momentary hesitation. "But it ought

all to be kept quiet until certain steps are taken. Do you know anybody who can be depended on not to talk?"

"Yes. Tom Halliday for one. My super for another. It happens Halliday is at the station now. I presume you're not asking us to conceal anything that ought to be told."

"You may judge that for yourself."

A quarter of an hour later Halliday and the station superintendent came into the room.

Stuart did not introduce the bushranger. He pointed to Jones.

"This man wants to make a confession. I am asking you to be witnesses. My understanding is that it is to be a written one."

"And that nothing is to be said about it afterward. The confession is to be forwarded to the proper officials." Haxon made this contribution.

Halliday looked at him curiously. He wondered who this smartly dressed stranger could be.

"I can live under my hat," he said.

The superintendent nodded.

"So can I."

"Good," Haxon said. "Some one must take it down in writing."

Tom Halliday drew paper and pen toward him.

"I'll do that."

Very reluctantly Jones went over his story again. He might be putting a rope around his own neck. By concealing the crime and sharing the profits of it he had made himself an accessory after the fact. What he would have liked to do was to confess without suffering any ill consequences; but in any case confess he must. The compelling eyes of the bushranger were upon him. He had not the courage to stand out against the savage force back of them. Occasionally Haxon prodded him with a pertinent question.

When Jones came to the name of Killough the Scotchman interrupted with a surprised query.

"Do you mean Captain Henry Killough, now serving at Sydney?"

"Yes," Jones said sullenly.

"Be careful what you say," Haxon jeered. "Captain Killough moves in the best colonial society."

"Can't say anything about that," Jones growled. "All I know is I saw him kill Shifty Mullin and plant the job on you."

"On this gentleman?" Halliday exclaimed.

The smile of the stranger was bitter.

"I'm no gentleman. I'm Haxon the bushranger, and before that I was No. 12,111, a yellow-jacket convict. My back has kissed the cat. At Toongabbee I took two hundred hard. Sorry you couldn't have been there to enjoy it."

Stuart spoke sharply to his overseer, who had made a motion to rise.

"Keep your seat, Van. We'll see this business out the first thing we do."

"Exactly," drawled Haxon. "What are five hundred pounds? You can find that much growing on mulberry bushes."

He sat astride a chair, his arms akimbo across the back of it. No weapon was in his hand, but two revolver butts projected from the belt above his hips. Though he made no verbal threats, it was apparent that he watched warily the movements of the other men in the room. His seat was near the door. None of them could have made a bolt without passing him.

Jones continued with his story. After he had finished Stuart asked two or three questions to make vague points clearer. The confession was signed, witnessed and sealed.

"And how about me, gentlemen?" Jones whined. "Wot we did, the missis and me, was done in fear of our lives. S'help me, it was. This Killough is a terrible man. He made threats. I was in fear of being killed myself."

"We're not thinking about you," Stuart told the man curtly. "A great injustice has been done, and you helped to do it. What we have to do is to clear Mr. Haxon of this murder.

"So that I can be properly hanged as a bushranger," Haxon said ironically. "This comes a little late in the day for me."

"I'm not so sure of that," Halliday broke in. "We'll get up a petition for your pardon, of course. Everybody will sign it."

"I wonder if Mr. Howes, manager of the Parametta bank, will sign it?" Haxon

suggested. "I wonder if the relatives of Miss McQueen will break their necks to get to that petition."

"Awkward about the bank robbery," Halliday admitted. "I don't suppose you could return the money, could you? That would help."

"It would be an admission that I had taken it," Haxon said, with his sardonic smile. "No, I don't see how I could do that. This poster here charges me with it. Of course I plead not guilty."

"The bank business is a sticker to get by," the superintendent said. "I don't see how it's to be done."

"You're lucky Miss McQueen was not much hurt, compared to what she might have been," Stuart said to the bushranger coldly.

"The shot was aimed at the clerk," Haxon said, after a moment of hesitation.

He did not intend to say anything that would put the blame on Robbins rather than himself.

"So Miss McQueen says. I don't think that lets you out, any more than it lets you out because one of your ruffians did it and not you in person. You're responsible for them. If Miss McQueen had been killed we would have shot you down like dingoes, all three of you."

Stuart spoke with quiet intensity, looking straight at the outlaw.

"I would have no complaint at that," Haxon said, just as quietly. He wondered if the young squatter had a special interest in Mary McQueen. "Glad to know that Miss McQueen is doing well."

"We hope she is," Stuart corrected sharply. "There's always a danger of infection."

"If it was not for the bank affair I'd advise Mr. Haxon to surrender to the authorities," Van Wyck, the superintendent, said. "The other stick-ups might be fixed somehow, but the bank one was too flagrant."

"It might be better to surrender anyhow," Stuart said.

"And be turned over to the tender mercies of old Turk McQuirk," the bushranger said. "Thanks awf'ly, but I think I'll stick it in the bush."

Stuart had forgotten the major's interest in Mary McQueen. What he would do to Haxon if the outlaw fell into his hands would not bear thinking about. With two accounts to settle, he would be bound to punish the man terribly.

The Scotch squatter shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll have to do as you think best. We can hardly ask for a pardon while you're still bushranging."

"Not what I came to see you about," Haxon said grimly. "I'll paddle my own canoe, thank you. But as a magistrate you can't sit down and let a murderer escape. Since we're both law abiding citizens, I've a right to ask you to have this man Jones's wife interrogated. If Captain Killough is guilty I want him punished."

"I'll do the best I can about that," Stuart promised.

"You'll have to work on the quiet. If Killough knows what you're doing he'll take steps to get to her first. He might cut her throat too, if he can get a leave of absence to go back to England."

"He would if it would get him out of a hole," Jones said vindictively. "Keep him away from the old woman, gentlemen. She ain't done any harm. I made her shut 'er mouth and she's kept still."

"The papers will have to go to England," Stuart said. "We'll all pledge our words to say nothing about this until some official action is taken. Do you all agree to that?"

Those present pledged themselves to secrecy.

"Don't make any mistake, gentlemen," Haxon explained, a cruel light in his hard eyes. "I'm not expecting you to do anything for me. I'm done. It's all over but the last scene. This villain Killough ruined me. He did it with devilish malice. I want to see him pay. I want to see him dragged through the hell I've endured. I'd like to be there when he gets his first Botany Bay dozen, if he's not hanged in England for what he did. I'd like to see him on a chain gang and in the Tiger's Den on the *Success*. That's where I come in on this."

HE SPOKE with appalling ferocity. His appetite for revenge seemed terrible to Stuart and Halliday, yet it was wholly understandable and logical. He must have lain awake nights gloating on tortures he would like to have inflicted upon his enemy.

"That Killough, he's a wrong un," Jones agreed, still intent on saving his own hide if he could. "He'd ought to be turned off by the hangman, what with getting a decent chap like me into a scrape like this."

Abruptly Haxon came to the support of the man.

"Do what you can for Jones, gentlemen. The money tempted him to keep still, and after that Killough had the whip hand and wouldn't let him speak out to save me. It's Killough I want, not this poor devil. There must be other evidence you can turn up back there, when the police are on the right track and check up on the real murderer. I hope they don't hang him. I'd like to see him dragged out here and put through what he's made a hundred others suffer. I'd almost surrender to be present in person."

Halliday dropped the quill and looked at the bushranger.

"You're wrong there. It never did anybody good to cherish hate. Not that I'm saying I'd feel any different in your place. But the point is to get started right now. There's a chance—I don't know how good it is—of getting your bushranging winked at because of the wrong that's been done you. But you'll have to stop your raids and your stick-ups. I've got a little plan that I'd like to mention to you privately, Mr. Haxon."

"If you're going home, Tom, you might ride part of the way with Mr. Haxon," Stuart suggested.

"Why not?" the outlaw assented. "Can I ask you, Mr. Stuart, to get Jones back to the station where he works?"

"I'll take care of him," the Scotchman agreed.

The bushranger rose.

"Then we'll be going, Mr. Halliday and I. It's been a very pleasant little meeting. Don't hurry, gentlemen. Stay and talk it over for a short time after we've gone. Give me ten minutes, and after that the armistice is off. I'm all against any hurry-up attempt to earn five hundred pounds."

"So am I," Stuart said. "It couldn't be done that way, and I don't want any of my men hurt. Take your time. We're not going to interfere."

Halliday and Haxon walked to the hitch-rack where the outlaw had tied his horse, and from there down to the pound in which the squatter had turned his loose. The young sheepman caught and saddled, while the bushranger sat on the fence, his back to the house, an inviting target for any one who had use for five hundred pounds. He felt pretty sure that Stuart would keep faith and see that his superintendent did also.

The two men rode into the ten-mile paddock and presently were swallowed up in the brush.

"About that plan of yours," Haxon presently suggested.

"I can use another herder. From what I gather you did a pretty good job disguising yourself at the Parametta bank robbery. Can't you get yourself up as a dirty old sundowner and lie doggo for a few months until we hear from England? I'd put you out in the bush twenty miles from the station in a thick scrub country. Nobody would see you except the chap who took your tucker to you once a week. If necessary, I could do that myself. I don't think there would be much risk of getting caught."

"Very little. Thanks for the offer. Dashed good of you, Mr. Halliday. If I were playing a lone hand I'd take it. But I'm not. The men out there in the bush with me are chaps I induced to start in that game. Without me they wouldn't last a month. I can't quit without letting them down."

"Aren't you rather sentimentalizing it? After all, it's every man for himself in the bush. They went into it with their eyes open."

"I daresay it's tosh, but I've jolly well got to stick."

"If they surrendered they'd get off pretty light, I fancy. The reward was only fifty pounds each for them," Halliday argued.

"That's just what they wouldn't. Old Turk would a lot rather have me, but lacking me they'd do very well. He'd make an example of them. His vanity is hurt, because he's always boasted no convicts could break from his camp without getting caught within a week. We punctured that claim, and wounded him while we were about it. Later we wounded his friend, Miss McQueen. He would skin them alive."

"I suppose he would," the squatter admitted. "Sorry. I could take you on with some chance of not being found out, but I can't aid and abet a whole gang of bushrangers. I'd pretty soon find I was in quod myself."

"You've both been awf'ly white about it, you and Stuart. I won't forget it."

"It's not so easy to straighten out tangles in other people's lives," Halliday said ruefully. "Take Killough. I don't feel sorry for him. He deserves all he'll get. But some one else will have to suffer with him. I notice there's usually a woman enduring grief when men's sins find them out."

"Is there a woman in this case?"

"Yes. Killough is engaged to a beautiful girl—a Miss Victoria Day. They are to be married after the New Year. That may be before we hear from England. We'll have to stop it somehow."

Halliday did not observe the change in the face of the other man.

"Why?" asked the bushranger, his voice harsh and strained. "Let them alone. Any woman who would marry Killough deserves what trouble comes to her."

The squatter glanced at him, surprised at the ferocity of the judgment. He saw now that the outlaw's face was set and rigid.

"I don't agree with you," he said shortly. "The most innocent girl is the one likely to be deceived by a villain."

Haxon laughed mirthlessly. He drew up his horse.

"I cut west here," he said. "See you again perhaps some time. Maybe you'll be at my hanging."

Impulsively Halliday held out his brown hand.

"You've had a cursed bad cut of the cards. Hope you'll have better luck now."

The bushman lifted his eyebrows and smiled sardonically.

"Really, Mr. Halliday, I don't think you'd better shake hands. You mentioned getting sentimental about bushrangers and such trash. It won't do, you know. I've met a few, and they are far from respectable. Some of 'em aren't even honest. No, no! We've got to draw the line somewhere. I'll be saying *au revoir.*"

Haxon turned his horse and gave it the spur.

CHAPTER XVI

KILLOUGH MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

HAXON hitched his horse to a rail of the fence and walked to the house along a path bordered with rosebushes. In the soft moonlight he made out that it was a small place, kept with loving care. There were flowers everywhere, neatly bedded and trimmed. Morning-glories circled the porch posts. The house itself reminded him of cottages he had seen in English villages. It had two little dormer windows, from both of which light streamed.

The door was opened to his knock by a little old woman with black, bird-like eyes. She was so small that for a moment he thought her a child.

"Miss Ferris?" he asked.

She bobbed a little curtsey.

"Yes, sir."

"I called to ask about Miss McQueen," he said.

"She is doing very nicely, sir. It wasn't much more than a scratch, though it bled a good deal."

Without quite knowing how it had happened she found this good looking young man in the kitchen with the door closed behind him. She thought his smile was very attractive, though there seemed to be a shadow of pain behind it.

"I feel a bit responsible for her hurt," he explained. "So I came around to make inquiries."

"You're young Mr. Trent, the bank clerk," she guessed, and because he was so very personable she offered herself his ally. "Miss McQueen is in the next room. I think perhaps she'd see you if

you want to explain anything."

"Just what I'd like to do, dear lady," he assured her.

"Wait here just a moment, please."

Jane Ferris had been a combination nurse and governess for the McQueen family more than fifteen years. She was now retired on a pension to her own house at Parametta, but she still regarded herself as a member of the family. Quite naturally, after Mary had been hurt, she was taken to the home of Jane to be nursed there until she was well enough to stand the trip to the sheep station.

"It's the clerk at the bank, my dear," Jane fluttered. "He's a beautiful young man, and he wants to pay his respects. I think it would be quite all right if I stay in the room."

"He didn't seem to me so beautiful," Mary said with a laugh of friendly derision. "But if he has anything he wants to say, let's have in your lovely young man."

Jane fussed around, pulling at this and straightening that to make the room tidy. Presently she brought in the visitor.

Mary lay on a lounge. She was fully dressed except that a robe had been pinned around her shoulders in place of a bodice.

The fine gray eyes of the girl rested upon the bushranger as he came into the parlor. Whatever shock of surprise she may have felt was not betrayed.

"So you are Mr. Trent," she said scornfully.

"Unfortunately, no," Haxon answered. "Miss Ferris jumped at that conclusion. What I said was that I feel responsible for your wound, more or less."

"More? Or less?" the girl asked, her gaze fixed on him.

"Rather less than more. If you're asking me to apportion the blame I'll say about seventy per cent yours, twenty-five per cent divided between Trent and the man who fired the shot, and the other five per cent mine."

Miss Ferris rose from the chair upon the edge of which she had perched herself.

"If you're not Mr. Trent—"

Haxon interrupted to explain—

"I happened to be an innocent bystander, Miss Ferris."

"You needn't try to tell me, young man, that my lambie was to blame for what that villain Haxon did to her," the old lady said indignantly.

"He means, Jane, that I shouldn't have lost my head and cried for help, knowing what a ruffian this Haxon is," Mary explained.

Yet even while she defied him her eyes appraised wonderingly the change in him. Always before she had seen him in filth or rags. Now he wore the best that money could buy, and with an easy grace few could command. Good clothes set off his brown, mocking face, his finely modeled shoulders, the lean loined vigor of his movements. Yet his costume alone did not make the difference between what he was today and what he had been then. She saw in him less of the savage bitterness, less of the tragedy of a lost soul. It was as though he had somehow rejoined again the ranks of the living.

"A mistake in judgment, Miss McQueen. We all make them. Lucky yours turned out no worse," he said.

The gray eyes flashed.

"I wonder if you didn't make one coming here tonight."

"I wonder," he said. "It's on the knees of the gods."

"It might turn out a fatal one," she challenged.

"For me—or for some one else?" he drawled.

Excitement raced in Mary's blood. She tried to lay it to anger at his audacity, and knew that would not do. The lift of the spirit she had felt at sight of him walking so lightly into the room, the flow of warmth into her bosom, did not have their origin in contempt.

"Why did you come?" she asked.

"I wonder. Though I don't like to confess it, I am afraid I am human. I came because I wanted reassurance."

"To make sure your man had hit me?"

He smiled.

"To make sure the fool hadn't hurt you seriously. Your friend Stuart told me so two days ago, but I wanted first hand testimony."

Color swept into the girl's cheeks. A

clamor of clashing cymbals beat within her breast. Later, she knew, she would flog herself with self-contempt for this. Had she no better sense, no more pride, than to let herself become emotional over a villain from the hulks?

"Do you follow up the history of all the wounded you leave in your wake?" she asked with surface derision.

"Not all of them. I didn't go back to find out about dear Major McQuirk."

"You have no right to be here," Mary told him. "Some one is going to call tonight. If he found you—"

"Don't tell me that sturdy old character, the Turk, is coming to see you."

A flurry of panic took the young woman. If they met—the man who was coming and this one here whom he had so greatly wronged—something dreadful was bound to happen. She must get the outlaw away before the other arrived.

"I am very tired," she pleaded. "Please, if you would go."

"Since you put it that way. Before I outstay my welcome."

He bowed derisively and turned to go.

Jane continued to flutter.

"Who is this man, Mary?" she asked.

There were light footsteps on the stairway, the entrance to which was evidently by the door beside the sofa. Neither Mary nor John Haxon answered Jane. Both of them were watching the door.

It opened, and into the room came Victoria Day. Her glance flew to the man—and did not leave him. She stood poised, astonishment on her face, and, after the first flash of amazement, fear.

"You!" she cried.

John Haxon's face hardened. There had been a touch of gay animation in it, sardonic, perhaps, but not bitter. This went out instantly.

"A pleasure to meet an old friend, isn't it?" he asked grimly.

Even as she stood there with the color washing out of her face, with terror in her big green eyes, she was a creature of loveliness, soft, pliant and seductive. John Haxon remembered the hours when he and she, two eager lovers, had been in each other's arms—and he trod the memory down savagely. She was the woman who had betrayed him to save herself.

She did not answer. A pulse beat fast in her white throat.

"It isn't often that we meet, is it? The last time you were indisposed, the time before that indiscreet. No doubt you have recovered entirely from both attacks."

He stood there, jeering at her.

THE great eyes in the wan face begged him not to destroy her by revealing their secret.

"Could I—see you alone?" she asked at last. "In the kitchen—for a minute."

Jane remembered her duties as chaperon and recurred to her theme.

"Who is this man, if you please?"

Nobody paid the slightest attention to the question.

"Thanks, no," he said. "I saw you alone once before, and I found it a too expensive luxury."

"I—have something to say to you," she begged.

"To me." He lifted his eyebrows in satiric pretense of surprise. "Consider your reputation, as an innocent young ornament of society, engaged to be married to that splendid character, Captain Killough of her Majesty's army. Let me felicitate you, Miss Day. There is only one Henry Killough. I say it all when I tell you that I believe you are worthy of him."

The lips of the girl trembled.

"Go on. I can't stop you," she said.

Jane advanced to battle, a diminutive but valiant champion.

"Young man, I don't know who you are, but I can tell you one thing. You are no gentleman."

Haxon gave her his ironic smile.

"Correct, Miss Ferris. We betray ourselves, don't we? But what else could you expect of a thief, a murderer, a convict, a lifer on a chain gang, a robber and a bushranger?"

The little woman gasped. He had taken her breath away.

"Do you mean that you—?"

She stopped. It was really too ridiculous.

"This is the bushranger, Haxon, Jane," the girl on the lounge said quietly.

"Lawk a mercy me!" the old nurse cried. "Have you come to murder us all in our beds?"

"Not in your beds, Miss Ferris."

"Don't worry, Jane," Miss McQueen told her. "He isn't going to hurt us. He daren't."

"Have you got any nasty guns with you that will go off?" Jane demanded sharply.

"They don't go off if people don't get excited," he said.

"You've got no business here, young man, and I'll thank you to get out."

A knock sounded on the parlor door. Jane said instantly—

"Come in."

When the door opened, it was Captain Killough who stepped into the room. At sight of the bushranger his heavy, flushed face grew splotchy in color. He stopped, uncertain whether to make a bolt of it.

"Here comes the groom," Haxon derided. "Come on in, Captain. Don't think of leaving us. We're all glad to see you. I've just been wishing your young lady joy of her husband-to-be. What are you afraid of, Captain? Surely you don't think anybody here would hurt you."

The outlaw had taken three swift strides to the door to forestall retreat. Killough had lost his chance to escape. His feet reluctantly carried him forward. Something inside of him seemed to have collapsed and let his heart down. He believed that he was very near death, but he forced himself to hold his head up in a soldierly fashion.

"What are you doing here with these young ladies, you villain?" he demanded.

"That's a hard word, my dear cousin," the bushranger reminded him. "You forget I'm not wearing chains these days. It's been—let me see—how many months since you ordered me that Botany Bay dozen and lost ten pounds on it?"

"Did you come here to murder me?" Killough said, his voice showing a trace of the panic he could hardly keep down.

"I didn't *come* for that purpose. Your arrival is an unexpected pleasure. But you will remember, Henry, dear, I told you my hour was coming."

The captain squared his shoulders.

"I'm not afraid of you, murderous ruffian though you are."

"On the contrary, you're very much afraid of me. It's written in your eyes. You're trying to fight back fear, and making a devilish bad job of it."

"I know you've got a pistol," the officer cried hoarsely.

"Two, since you raise the point, dispersed about my person. But it takes time to get into action even with a revolver. If you made a dive for me, perhaps you might earn five hundred pounds, Henry, and you're always hard up, you know. Come. You weigh twenty pounds more than I do. It's a fighting chance. Screw up your pluck and try it."

As Haxon taunted him, the outlaw stood with feet apart, hands in the pockets of his riding breeches. Only his glittering eyes were quick with life. But Killough, glaring at him, remembered how swiftly he could lash into action from deceptive indolence. The soldier was a little fat, a little flabby. What he feared was that his cousin was spurring him to attack in order to get an excuse to kill.

"I don't want to have anything to do with you," he said sullenly.

"No family affection in you—no wish to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' with your long lost but happily restored cousin?"

"What are you going to do with me?" The words burst from Killough almost in a scream.

Haxon turned to Mary, who knew he was baiting the other man as dogs do a bear.

"No sentiment in the man," he said, shaking his head. "You wouldn't think, Miss McQueen, that we two have paddled in the burn and all that sort of thing. It has been my great privilege to have known Henry all my life. We used to spend our holidays together at Oak Manor, one of my uncle's places. My real name is Geoffrey Blake, by the way, as you once guessed."

"I was sure of it," Mary cried.

"Always sour and jealous, Henry was. You see, I was the heir, and he was only a sort of courtesy poor relation. That was his bad luck. He couldn't stand to have every one from the servants up making more of me than they did of

him. I think he always hated me. I'm right about that, aren't I, Henry?"

Killough ripped loose an oath.

"Yes, always," he assented angrily.

"I had to thrash him once for bullying a youngster," the bushranger explained. "He never forgave me that. And he's a good hater. That's Henry's forte, sitting like a cat at a mouse hole. He bided his time, and like a fool I played into his hands. I was wild and extravagant. My debts were stiff. Old Sir Eustace had—still has, I expect, though Henry will have to tell you about that—a devil of a temper and a dashed stiff back. He's a punctilious old chap. Thought a gentleman should live within his means. We quarreled—often—even though we were fond of each other. We had a devil of a flare-up one day about a bill some money lender forwarded to him, one of a good many I owed. That night some one broke into his desk and helped himself to the money in it. The evidence pointed to me. I know now I have to thank dear Henry for that. He took the money himself and made me the suspect. He's good at that sort of thing, Henry is."

"That's a lie," Killough protested. "I had nothing to do with it." But his protuberant eyes flinched.

"Henry is no fool. He knew that with me out of the way the old gentleman would have to turn to him for an heir, even though he didn't like him much. All Henry had to do was to queer my pitch. So he did it. Of course I had no better sense than to help him out. When Sir Eustace turned loose on me I slanged the old boy back. He said I was a disgrace to the name Blake and that I was a rotten stick through and through. I swore I'd never use the name again until he apologized. He told me to get off the place and never come back. From that day to this I've never seen him or had a word from him. But I've seen dear Henry. He got on the stand at my trial and swore falsely against me—said he saw me coming out of Mullin's diggings just after the murder. That was another lie. First and last I owe Henry a lot. I'm going to do my best to pay in full."

"If you kill me you'll be hanged for it," Killough growled.

"I'll be hanged if I do, and I'll be hanged if I don't—providing they catch me. So that doesn't count much, Henry. The question is whether I ought to rob your fiancée of her intended. Since you're the heir now Miss Day would have the same position socially and financially she would have had if certain other arrangements had gone through. It desolates me to interfere with your plans, Miss Day. You'd make a very charming hostess at Oak Manor."

He bowed to Victoria ironically.

"Is it my fault you threw away your chances and went wild?" Victoria asked, a breathing color in her lovely face.

"Not at all. The only mistake you made was in sticking to the first love too long. But why reproach you with too great constancy? It's a virtue of your sex to be true, is it not?"

He asked the question with a sarcastic smile.

"I asked you to let me see you alone," Victoria said in a low voice. "I told you I had something to say."

"Of what use, since you didn't say it at the right time? We must not make your Henry jealous. Better breathe your confidences to him."

"You're not fair to me," Victoria cried in a gust of defiant anger. "What else could I have done but what I did?"

"Have I made any complaint, either then or now?" he asked.

"You look at me as though—I were some one below contempt."

"Does it matter how I look, since I am who I am—Haxon the murderer, the yellow-jacket, the bushranger?"

"Then why do you torment me?" The girl stamped her foot in impotent resentment. "Why don't you go, and leave me alone?"

"I think you had better, Mr. Blake," Mary said gently.

"I think so too," the outlaw agreed. "Come, Killough, shall we leave the ladies alone?"

"I—I'm not going with you."

Killough spoke out of a throat gone very dry. What was it Haxon had once said—that when his hour came the very devils in hell would pity the soldier?

"My mistake, apparently. I thought you were."

The bushranger smiled, but the other

found no comfort in that terrible expression.

Mary McQueen spoke.

"I'll ask a favor of you, Mr. Blake, because of that five per cent blame you admit as to my wound."

Instantly Haxon caught the drift of her intention.

"No, no. You mustn't come between cousins who have been so long separated and are wearying for a chat alone together."

"But I want to do just that," she said. "I'm asking you to go away and leave Captain Killough here with us."

He looked down at the young woman gazing up at him with such valiant insistence. That she was not basing her claim for consideration on the accident of the wound he understood quite clearly. She had been a friend to him and to his friend when they both desperately needed one. Now she asked for payment of the debt, and he had to give her demand weight.

In her gray eyes he read something that stirred a little tumult of excitement in him. Mary was not asking this for Killough, not primarily at least. She was asking it on his own account, because she wanted to save him from plunging deeper into crime. Convict and bushranger though he was, she was still pledged to his cause. Across the chasm that lay between them, her heart yearned for him mightily. A wave of exultation flooded him. No woman ever gave to any man except the one she loved a look like that.

Haxon drew a deep breath.

"Very well. Since you ask it I'll postpone my talk with him."

"Thank you," she murmured.

He walked to the door, opened it and shut it behind him.

A moment later they heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs.

CHAPTER XVII

VICKY MAKES A CONFESSION

KILLOUGH flung his gloves petulantly to the floor.

"If I'd only had a weapon," he burst out.

The young woman to whom he was engaged looked at him, a touch of contempt in her eyes.

"What would you have done with it—given it to Geoff?" she asked.

"Damn it, I believe you're for that villain against me even now!" he cried, glaring at her.

"I thought a man waited until he had married a woman before he swore at her," Victoria flashed.

The captain clenched his teeth down on the anger boiling up in him. Furious though he was, he could not afford to indulge his rage.

"Sorry, Vicky. It slipped out. My gorge always rises at that fellow. We must get word to the constables at once that he was here."

Mary pulled herself back to earth.

"Of course not. Why should we? He didn't do us any harm. All he came for was to tell me he was sorry I had been hurt—the same reason that brought you and Vicky here from Sydney."

"So you're ready to get sentimental about him too, are you?" Killough said with a sneer. "If a scoundrel is a bad enough rotter the women are always on his side."

The girl on the lounge had a more potent argument in reserve.

"It wouldn't be safe for you to go out yet to get the constables. He may still be in town."

"You're right," the officer agreed after a moment of thought. "It would be like him to be hanging around in the hope of a potshot at me. And he's armed. I'd better stay here to look after you in case he comes back."

"I think so," Mary assented.

"We're lucky we got out alive," Jane said. "I never saw a more villainous looking face."

"You told me he was a beautiful young man," Mary teased.

"That was when I thought he was Mr. Trent, the bank clerk," Jane explained.

"I still don't know why the ruffian didn't kill me," Killough said. "Unless he didn't have the pluck."

"Because Mary begged you off," Victoria replied. "He as good as said so."

"I don't believe it. Why would he do it for Mary? I know him. He had some reason he didn't give."

"I'd feel safer if Captain Killough

stayed here tonight," Jane said. "If he wouldn't mind sleeping on the sofa."

Killough did not mind it at all. He preferred it to venturing out into the night where Geoffrey Blake might be roaming.

The young ladies had separate rooms upstairs, but it was inevitable that they would drift together for a talk before they retired. Victoria came into her friend's room in a dressing gown that revealed the rhythm of her lovely body. Mary could understand why the magic of her moved the hearts of men. She was so enticingly feminine.

"I might as well tell you, Mary, that I can't stand Henry," Victoria cried passionately. "I've never told a soul before, but—sometimes I hate him."

"Didn't you know that before you promised to marry him?" Mary asked.

"I wasn't sure of it—until tonight."

"Until you met Geoffrey Blake again."

"Yes. You saw them together, him and Geoff. Could any one prefer Henry to his cousin? Oh, I know I'm a bad girl. I've got to marry Henry, and I know I oughtn't to think of any one else. But—can't you see how a girl could be madly in love with Geoff?"

"I can see that," Mary said quietly, all aglow with the thought.

"He wasn't always a bushranger. When I knew him he was the heir of Sir Eustace Blake. I was living in England with my aunt at the time we met. My father and mother were stationed in Jamaica with the regiment. Everybody raved about him. He was the best shot in the county, a splendid rider, a good cricketer. One of those men who do everything well. We were wildly in love with each other. He's the only man I ever really cared for."

"What went wrong?"

"Geoff did. Was I to blame for that? He was wild and got into debt. His uncle accused him of stealing money and disowned him. You heard him tell about that. He disappeared in London and took the name Haxon. When he couldn't get work he decided to go to Canada. We had been writing, in care of one of our maids. Before sailing, he came to York to see me. You know our regiment had been transferred to York."

Mary was intensely absorbed.

"Wasn't that where the—the murder was committed?"

"Yes." Victoria caught her hands in a desperate little gesture of regret. "If he hadn't come to see me he would never have been caught in such a trap."

One word of her friend's wail stood out for Mary.

"Trap! How do you mean trap?"

"Geoff didn't kill this man, Mullin."

"How do you know?" Mary asked, her heart hammering.

"I know because—because—he said at the trial he didn't."

That was not the reason, Mary knew, she had started impulsively to give, nor was it the one Mary intended to accept. But she knew better than to rush her friend. Vicky could be stubborn.

"Tell me the story as it came out at the trial," she said

Victoria told what had been in the newspapers.

"Then Captain Killough's testimony really condemned him," Mary said. "That and the fact that the dead man's purse and belongings were found in his room."

"Yes. There was some other evidence, but they said it wouldn't have been enough alone."

Mary went to the crux of the matter.

"Some one wanted him convicted and put the things in his room. Who?"

SHE looked directly into the big green eyes of Victoria and read there something close and secret.

Victoria tried to dodge. She had already said too much.

"Maybe the police did it, to build up a case against him."

"No. Henry Killough did it, because he hated him, because—"

Mary broke off. Her mind was working in swift flashes. She felt as though some bolt of truth was about to strike her.

"Who did kill Mullin? Who had a reason to do it? Why was he killed?"

"He had a lot of money on him. That's the reason they gave."

"And you heard what Geoffrey Blake said tonight, that his cousin is always hard up. It's true, too. He's in debt everywhere."

Victoria saw what she was driving at.

"No," she cried. "No. You haven't any right to say so. It isn't true."

"It's true he testified falsely against his cousin, isn't it? It's true he hid the purse in Geoff's room, isn't it?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

"The man who hid that purse must have got it from the dead body. Nobody else would have it. If Henry Killough trapped his cousin, it was after he had killed Mullin."

"No—no—no!"

Mary shifted the attack.

"You know a lot you haven't told," she said. "You know Geoff didn't kill this man. How do you know it? Either you know who did kill him, or else you know Geoff didn't do it because he couldn't have been on the spot."

"Why are you turning on me like that?" Victoria asked, weeping. "I thought you were my friend."

The gray eyes of Mary did not shift for an instant.

"I'm going to find out the truth," she said. "Do you know who killed this Mullin?"

"Of course I don't. How dare you say such a thing?"

"Then you know who didn't kill him. You know Geoffrey Blake couldn't have done it because—*he was with you at the time!*"

"He told you so," Victoria cried, startled at the thrust.

"You knew he was innocent. You could have saved him, and you didn't."

"Don't look at me like that," wailed Victoria. "He had no right to expect it, if he has any chivalry. I had—compromised myself—for him. Wasn't that enough? Did he want me to ruin my life—publicly—before the world?"

"How had you compromised yourself?"

"He was in disgrace. My people would not have let me see him if they had known he was in York. They had never met him, but they knew the stories about him. I stole out of the house at night, and because it was so cold and anyhow I might be seen—I—went to his room." The girl hurried on, to forestall condemnation. "I know how wicked it was. You needn't tell me. But we were in love. Oh, so much! And we hadn't seen each other for many months, and perhaps never would again."

"What time did you go to his room?"

"Maybe it was ten o'clock."

"And you left there?"

"The clock struck two while we were walking to my home."

"During this time the murder was committed?"

"Yes."

"And he had been with you all the time? He hadn't left the room?"

"No. He was there all the time. You will despise me, but—you don't know. You are so cold. You've never been in love. You don't know what it is."

"No, I don't know that," Mary said in a low voice. "But if you loved him so much surely you couldn't let him go to his death without a word. You told your mother—your father—some one."

"How could I? No. I kept still—and I had a horrible time. I was so unhappy—before the trial, and while it lasted, and afterward, that I fell ill."

"But you let the judge sentence him to death and never spoke," Mary accused.

"You talk as though there was anything else for me to do. If I had spoken I would have been ruined completely. You know that, Mary. If a girl makes a mistake everybody tramps on her. She had better be dead. I couldn't face it—I couldn't. But I kept hoping somehow he would get off, and just before—before the last day they reprieved him to transportation for life. That made me happier."

"Did it?" Mary said dryly.

"You aren't fair to me," Victoria protested. "It's easy for you to sit there and judge me. But if it had been you—"

"He could go to his death to save your reputation, but you couldn't say the word that would have saved him. That's a queer kind of love, Vicky."

"I didn't blame him for—for letting me run the risk of disgrace and everything. He oughtn't to have blamed me because he had to suffer the penalty of it instead of having me do it."

"How did Henry Killough know his cousin was in town?"

"My maid told him. He hired her to

spy on me. It seems he watched me leave the house and meet Geoff. He followed us to the lodgings. Later he saw Geoff take me home."

"So he knew Geoff couldn't prove an alibi without bringing you into it." Mary thought of that for a moment. "It was a terrible thing for him to do. But I can see how his mind worked. He got a double revenge—first on both you and Geoffrey to satisfy his jealousy, and secondly to make sure his cousin could never come back and be reinstated with his uncle."

"Yes," agreed Victoria. "Isn't it hateful?"

"Is that why you are marrying him?" Mary asked. "Because he knows your secret and you are afraid he'll tell it?"

Again Victoria said yes.

"I've tried to think I like him. But I don't. Not really, though sometimes he kind of stirs me, too. He can be nice sometimes. But I'd hate him if we were married."

"Yet you're going through with it, because you think that if you don't he'll whisper away your reputation. Haven't you any courage, Vicky? You don't have to marry him. Tell him you won't. Tell him if he talks you'll talk too; that you'll accuse him of killing Mullin, or whatever the man's name was."

"You don't understand," Vicky wailed. "I couldn't tell him that. I have no proof. I don't think it's true."

"Very well. Perjury. He gave false evidence at the trial. You can prove that with no difficulty whatever."

"That's just what I can't do, not without ruining my reputation. You don't understand. I fight against it, or I did as long as it was any use. I told him I never would. He stands there, pulling his mustache and smiling that hateful smile. I know what he means. If I don't marry him he'll talk. At the Café Parisien and at the Royal Hotel —to all the men that count. A whisper here—a whisper there—until I wouldn't have a shred of reputation left."

Mary saw it quite clearly. In that chaperoned Victorian age a girl dared not let a breath of scandal touch her, not if she hoped to marry well. Mary McQueen had known the free squatter life, but even in Sydney all the conventions had to be observed meticulously by the unmarried girl.

"So you don't mean ever to free Geoffrey Blake of this charge that has ruined him," she said.

"I can't. And it wouldn't do any good now if I did. It would ruin me and not help him. You forget he's a bushranger."

"You're going to let an innocent man go through life branded as a murderer when you can clear him?"

"The harm has been done now. He's lost anyhow. I've got to think of myself."

"You always have," Mary charged bluntly. "I knew you were selfish—in little things. But this is different. You have to speak out to save your own soul."

TO BE CONTINUED

The Up and Up

By THOMSON BURTIS

I AM very anxious indeed that all the boys, especially Johnny Mull, should understand all the ins and outs of what happened in Louisville before I again come back to Times Square. There is positively no reason for Johnny to be peevish or his boys to be looking for me. There is practically nobody I think more of than Johnny Mull, who is very rich and powerful; and I thought he knew that I am always strictly on the up and up at all times with man or beast.

I made my reputation along the stem in the fight racket; so maybe some of the boys don't know that I am an all around sportsman who has picked up many a dollar in connection with practically all sports. But when a sportsman starts thinking like a sucker, and a woman butts into the deal, how is a smart feller like myself going to know where he gets off at?

Anyway, here is the truth; and I am very anxious to have everybody know it, so that when I finish my vacation I will have no explanations to make along Broadway.

It started one afternoon about four o'clock. I had just finished breakfast, and at the corner of Broadway and 47th Street I see Trigger Toomey giving a doll the eye. The jane he was giving the up and down kinda half stopped and then hurried on. Toomey was pretty good looking in a vulgar way, although wild looking. When she goes on he turns around and sees me.

"Come on," he says right away, "let's get a cup of java."

I knew it must be on business or he wouldn't have offered to buy me the java. So we enter a Coffee Pot and I take the seat closest to the door. He takes off his derby—he was a very neat dresser, although kind of quiet, always wearing blue and black. He runs his fingers through his black hair and them bulging eyes glitter at me.

"I need you," he says, "because, as you know, none of the big shots will hire me no more nor have no truck with me whatsoever on account of they think I am too quick on the trigger and unreliable."

I nodded, wondering what fast one he had up his sleeve. There was some reason for him apparently coming clean with me like that. He had been a gunman in Chicago before being run out of town for the same reason he now could get no regular work in New York. He shot too quick and often and was positively always in trouble. A fit of temper or a woman, or a drink or a shot, and he was poison and nothing meant noth-

ing to him. In general, a Chicago rodman carries one gun and talks about it. The boys who make good in the Big Town carry two and keep their mouths shut. Trigger belonged in Chi.

"So I need a contact man," he tells me. "A front man for the simplest, easiest job ever pulled off, and strictly on the level too. Nobody must know it is my idea or that I am connected with it."

"What is the racket?" I asks.

He leans forward and says very sincerely—

"If you ever open your mouth about it, or try to doublecross me, or even let a word leak out, it is going to take you a week to die."

"Ha-ha," I says, but I did not feel that way. But I was broke. "You and I have always been pals, and you talk that way. Ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha, nuts!" he says. "There's a hundred grand in this, so don't ha-ha nothing off, mister."

"That's scratch," I says.

"You're damn right it's scratch. You know Johnny Mull, don't you?"

I think fast. He was the biggest bookmaker in the East, and I had once made a bet on a fight with him when I was in the money and the fight was in the bag. He learned about it, but nevertheless he paid off, so he knew I was smart.

"Why?" I said finally.

"Don't hold out on me!" he says, his voice sort of choking. He is of a very peevish disposition, as all the boys know. "Do you know him or don't you?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now listen. The Kentucky Derby is being run Saturday—and you know that Johnny Mull runs a future book on it."

I nodded. On some big races, like the Derby, some big bookmakers take bets on it for a year in advance of the race. You can bet on any one of a couple of hundred pigs that are eligible for it, at odds of from one thousand to fifty-to-one. The odds go down the closer the race gets. Only about fifteen of 'em 'll start, of course, but if your horse don't start you lose the same as if the turtle had started and blowed.

"Well, what of it?" I says.

"Plenty of it, hatchet-face, plenty. There ain't but one horse in the race—Black Diamond."

I nodded again.

Then he springs it, and was it a darb? In the first place, he claimed to know that Johnny Mull had booked a hundred grand on Black Diamond and odds from ten to one down to evens, which the pig is now, and stands to lose half a million when Black Diamond wins. In the second place, Trigger knew Black Diamond's owner and that Black Diamond still had a weak leg and said it would be a cinch to persuade the owner to scratch Black Diamond in the Derby. In the third place, getting Black Diamond scratched was positively worth at least a hundred and fifty grand to Johnny Mull, because he could not only save paying off the bets he'd taken but could book a lot of other bets on the horse which was a cinch between now and the last minute before the race when the owner would scratch him.

"And so," Trigger ends up, "Johnny pays a hundred grand to us and fifty to Gower. You handle Johnny and also handle it in Louisville, on account of me being wanted there for a job last year. I will be around, of course, but not prominent, so don't start figuring how you can doublecross me."

"How you talk," I says.

"And how straight I shoot," he says.

So I start arguing for more money so that everything would seem all O.K. and on the up and up. He had to have me, especially because he thought that Johnny and me was very close pals. I am a very snappy dresser, and always put up a very neat front. Many's the time when things was tough I've spent a buck for spats instead of underwear, and I am very particular about my fingernails and the perfume I use. For a big deal I was his huckleberry, because I got the class, see?

ANYWAY, I am still figuring when I leave him and go up to Johnny's suite in a big office building on the Square at nine o'clock that evening. I had an awful time getting in, but finally I am let in by a very watchful guy and I see Johnny behind a big desk with a lot of slips stacked in front of him and a man

standing behind me.

"Well, if it isn't Slats Kirke," he says, clamping his teeth over his cigar. "Lock the safe, Bide, and then set on it."

"That's a good one," I said, and I felt very good to think that he knew me so well.

Johnny is very big and fat and wears gold rimmed cheaters and is a very lucky stiff who does business with big suckers. He had unlimited backing and was also a politician and a very big shot. The slips in front of him were bits of a grand or more each or he wouldn't have been bothering with them personally.

He tells me I can talk in front of the tough mug, who is not actually sitting on the safe, you understand, and so I go about it in a very diplomatic manner. I do not usually let anybody know exactly what I am up to until I have pulled it off, and very often they wonder about it after I have pulled it off. I do not say nothing about how it is to be done. I ends up:

"The question is how much it would be worth to you to know two days in advance that this Black Diamond was positively not going to run—and you being the only guy that knowed he was not going to run until the very last minute?"

He has got no more hair than a turtle has feathers, and he rubs his scalp and bites practically through his cigar, and his mouth becomes just a scratch across his face.

"And all I got to have in advance," I says, "is five C's."

"Oh!" he kind of sighs, leaning back. "I was wondering where the gimmick was."

"That ain't no gimmick. I got to get to Louisville, ain't I?"

"And see the race on my dough," he says in his silky voice.

Well, we go around and around. He wanted to know who was with me, and I told him nobody. He did not want to be mixed up in anything crooked that could come back on him. But I saw I had him practically hooked at the idea. Trigger was on the up and up, I decided, about the amount Johnny had on his future books. Finally I says to him—

"It looks as if you think I was trying to chisel some dough out of you and deliver nothing."

"Wouldn't that be funny?" he says, very good humored.

His nose was kind of like a pig's, but his gray eyes was very different and they was looking right through me all the time.

We argue about dough in advance and finally I say:

"Two hundred then. I got to get there—"

"A ticket costs about thirty bucks," he says.

"I've got to eat," I says.

"If you and Gower is such pals he should be able to persuade Black Diamond to share an oat with you," he says.

"That's a good one," I says.

"And here's a hundred-dollar bill, which is also a good one," he says. "I knew it would cost me something to let you in, but I didn't think it would be that much. Now, scram!"

"Leave everything to me, Mr. Mull."

"I might as well, before you take it," he says.

I could see he was not in a joking mood, so I says very frank:

"I am leaving tonight and I will not go wrong. Even if I was not on the up and up at all times with man or beast, I would not go wrong on you in any way whatsoever."

UP TO the train time I spent in a speakeasy with Trigger trying to find out what the second string to his bow was in case I couldn't get anywhere with this Gower, but he certainly gets very tight mouthed. Not until I'd bought ten dollars' worth of old-fashioneds did he start bragging and getting important, and finally he says—

"I won't be seeing much of you down there, but look for me with my camera at the finish line."

I couldn't make nothing out of that, so I pack my trunk and leave at six o'clock. I have white flannels and sport shoes and two sport coats and a golf outfit and a real sportsman's getup. Everybody is starting to talk about the Derby, and I keep wondering what they would say if they knowed who I was.

I get to Louisville at night and regis-

ter in a sportsman's hotel where I run across several dice men, touts, con boys and hustlers I knew. Pretty soon I find out that this here Gower and his jockey, named Benton, who had ridden Black Diamond in all his races, slept out at the stable with the horse. Black Diamond was their only hound and this here Gower had spent all the dough Black Diamond had made in purses on some church or school or some other graft down in Texas and now he did not have a dime.

There was nothing I could do until morning. I could catch 'em both at dawn when the horses were being galloped. So I went to a burlesque show. Although it was only Wednesday, Louisville was already so full that I could not get a good seat.

And who walks out for the first strip number but Tillie La Tour, a friend of mine and one of the best hip wavers on the wheel?

That was a break to find a girl to play around with in a strange town. Right away I start figuring. You never can tell when a doll will come in handy in a big deal such as I was about to pull off. I had worked once or twice with Tillie before and she knew her stuff.

When I turn around as she goes up the runway I see a tall, long-nosed guy looking at me, and I get a start for the minute, thinking I know him. I could not place him, however, although he looked as though he thought he recognized me too. Then he looks away. I get around all over the country when my palookas are fighting and am very well known, so that does not mean nothing to me.

Anyway, I send Tillie a note between the acts and after the show I take her out for coffee. I had often thought of marrying her, and once had mentioned the fact, kidding, because she was always working and good for a touch and was a very nice and convenient jane to have around. I never could get anywhere with her on account of her playing me to marry her, you understand. It is not often that a burlesque queen runs across a guy with my reputation and front. So, knowing that she was playing me for a sucker, I never brought up the marriage thing again because it made me sore to be thought a sucker for a jane, see?

Anyway, after we chew the fat a little I says to her—

"Tillie, I may be able to throw a little piece of change your way, because I am working on a very big deal and may need your help."

"There's no need to ask whether it's crooked or not," she says.

"No," I tell her, "this is strictly on the level, but I may need a girl to make a guy like her and just persuade him to do what I want him to do, which is for his own best interests anyway."

"Just a big philanthropist, like always," she says. "But let's go somewheres and get a drink."

Knowing that the amount of liquor I could afford to buy her would mean no more than the same amount of gas to a dirigible and knowing that I would get nowhere with her on account of her wanting to marry me, I made the excuse of having to be at the track in the morning. So we match to see who paid for the coffee, and I got to the hotel at two o'clock and read all the morning papers.

They were full of the race. All the experts wondered whether Black Diamond's bad leg would go bad in the race or before. On account of the fact that a million suckers, more or less, had bet their dough all over the world on the horse, all the papers give big space to a statement from this here Gower in which the sap said that he was positively going to give the public a run for its money and that even if it looked like a race might harm the horse, Black Diamond would positively start regardless.

I stayed up on account of having to be at the track at dawn, and in the lobby, along with clockers, exercise boys and such who had to be to the track early, I saw this big beaked boy I'd noticed in the theater who had a face something like a horse's himself. We sit next to each other in the lunchroom and I tell him that he looks familiar, although I never see many horses in my usual haunts.

"I thought I'd seen you, too," he told me.

When I tell him who I am and what

palookas I manage, he tells me he is a clocker, and we decide that we had run across each other in some hangout for sportsmen on 47th Street or somewhere —and we go out to the track together. We take a taxi that has special rates for the early morning run out there. When he sat down I saw a funny bulge in the waistline of his pants. Now I never heard of clocking pigs with a .38, but I positively do not say anything and am very uncomfortable during that lonesome ride to Churchill Downs and very much relieved when no false moves are made before we get there.

He offered to take me to the barn where Gower had his mule and I could not very well say no, having told him that the old man and I were bosom pals. The barns are across the track from the big green grandstand, and out on the track a great many mules are being warmed up and galloped. This fellow, who gave the name of Tracy, pointed out the empty stall where Black Diamond was kept.

"He's being galloped now," he says. "The old man will not want to talk until he is through."

Tracy joins the clockers, roosting on the fence like so many shivering crows, but I do not see him take out a watch. I did not like this. Then he points out Black Diamond—a big black stallion with all feet bandaged—galloping around the track with a gangling boy on his back.

"Is that his reg'lar jockey?" I asked Tracy, and he told me yes.

I could hear everybody raving about this gee-gee, Black Diamond, but I did not see nothing to rave about except that he was a little bigger than most horses.

A smart sportsman like myself has no time for the crowbaits. Five pounds extra in the saddle doesn't weigh as much as five C's in the jock's pocket, and a shot of dope in the mule's mouth is of positively no account alongside a few shots of hooch in the trainer the night before. It's the trainers and jockeys you got to handicap.

Finally I see Black Diamond trot off the track. And old Gower, with a long beard, helps unsaddle him.

"That's Gower wearing the spinach," says Horseface Tracy.

I am very much upset. I did not like that bulge in his waistband, and why should he point out the old billygoat to me when I had plainly stated that he and I was pals? Either he did not know nothing or he knew too much, but I could not think of nothing I had done recently that would put any of the boys on my trail. I decided to wait awhile and see what I could find out and whether I was in a tough spot or what.

So I go across the track to where that lanky jock was leading the stallion up and down and around underneath the arcade which covers a path that goes around each barn. The old billygoat was pulling at his beard and watching the dog's legs. I never seen such foliage on a man. It started at his eyes, and was so thick and tangled I would not have been surprised to see a canary bird fly out of it.

They have blanketed the horse and placed him in the boxstall with the upper half of the door open so he could stick his head out. There is no one nearby except the jock, who is inside the stall talking to the horse. Gower was leaning against the wall of the stable. He looked as though he could not stand without being propped up. When I come closer I saw he was about sixty, although how he could have grown that beard in that length of time was beyond me.

"MR. GOWER?" I says very polite.

He nodded, looking at me as though he did not see me.

"A friend of yours who is also a pal of mine told me to introduce myself," I says.

He had a kind of blank look in his watery eyes, as though he was seeing something I couldn't see.

"Well?" he says, as though he'd finally seen me and didn't like what he saw.

"His name is Toomey — Trigger Toomey—"

"That murderin' rat!" shrieks the old man, and now his eyes are like lightning.

That was the blowoff. I seen right then and there how I had been double-crossed.

"Hold your horses, hold your horses!" I tells the old goat, who is mumbling in his beard and looking at me like a buzzard at a corpse. "As a matter of fact, I must 'a' happened to meet up with him and told him I had some business with you and he told me he knew you. I don't really know him—"

"He shot down an innocent man in cold blood!" yells Gower, his voice cracking. "He—"

"He's no good," I told him. "But that ain't no reason why you and I should not get along."

I am figuring very fast. I had learned that the business about this old man giving all his money to some sort of a religious school down South was on the level, and that he was an old nut. So I mentions that I am interested in education.

He kind of warms up, and after we had damned Trigger Toomey to hell and old Gower, who talked like he was reading from the Bible, had had his say he tells me how he was contributing a lot of dough to his little Bible college down in the cotton belt and how some day it was going to turn out more ministers and missionaries on the hoof than there was heathens to convert. I seen that he very seldom had a chance to slice this boloney, so I am a very good audience.

The jock is in the stall crooning to the horse like he was in love with him. Finally he says—

"Who might you be and what do you want?"

I takes a long chance. I know that this old coot, aside from his cracked streak, was supposed to be a very smart guy where horses and the track was concerned.

"I am a sportsman who is very interested in the sport of kings," I told him, "and I am also a member of the Gideons which sells all them Bibles to the hotels."

He kind of snorts like he is very much surprised, which I am myself, as it had just come into my mind. Anyway, I goes on:

"Me and some of my friends are certainly strong for your horse, believing that he is really a great horse and that if anything should ever happen to him it would be a terrible thing for sportsmen everywhere. I understand that that bowed tendon of his is not fully strong yet and that maybe if you run him Saturday he might break down for good, which would be a terrible thing."

Father Time looks at me and rolls a brown paper cigaret. He clears a path to his mouth and lights it. When he spoke it was like a voice from the burning bush.

"He'll run and win," he says in a Southern drawl. "If he breaks down, it is the Lord's will."

"Now listen, pop," I says, "we know you need the money for your great work down South; and fifty grand is a lot of dough, to you, or me, or a Gideon, or a Morgan. And I'm here to bring you a lot of good news. The people along with me, being strictly right guys and some of 'em Gideons and others which go to church regular—"

"I could tell just by looking at you," he interrupts me with a very funny look in his eyes, "that you were a pious man. Are you a Methodist or—"

"Well, yes and no," I said, not wanting to get over my head. "But anyways, here is the lay. There's no reason for you to take no chance on breaking down your mule, which if you coddle him can win many a race yet and put many dolls and guys through the Bible and off the primrose path. So I'm here to offer you the fifty grand in cash if you will promise not to risk your goat in the Derby—"

Just what happened then I can not exactly state. I do not think I was hit. It was a kind of thunderstorm burst in this old feller which blew me back a few steps. And the funny thing is he ain't talking very loud, either, but you could see from his eyes he was crazy. He talked funny and ends up—

"And now get off this track or the Lord'll give me strength to break your damned neck!"

He starts using a lot of words out of the Bible, and I never heard such cussing. It made me very sore, and I can assure you that if I would have had him on my home grounds with some of the boys to back me up I would not have let him insult me that way. So I beat it while he was still insulting me and

went on across the track to the infield. I had acted in a very smart manner, you will all agree, but I did not expect to run into a guy that used the Bible for a racing chart. I was feeling very put out—and seeing this Tracy mug still there as though he was waiting for me did not give me any appetite.

I knew that the jockey was my only chance. At that I would not have been surprised to find that he thought he was an angel and that Black Diamond always won because he helped him along by flapping his wings.

I kind of hang around some ways away from Tracy and watch the mules being cooled out and listening to the racing writers and reporters and all chew the fat, and I see the old goat totter off around the stables and out of sight. Then the jock comes out and starts walking right toward me.

He could not have weighed a hundred and twenty, but he was very tall and, inasmuch as I did not know what his intentions were, I was a little uncomfortable but very interested. He had big eyes and a foxy kind of face and had a kind of spavined walk.

"You the feller that talked to Old Faithful?" he asks me.

"Well, yes," I admits because I couldn't do nothing else.

Of course, I wanted to see him bad, but I wanted to know what he had on his mind first. As soon as he looks around to see that nobody was near I knowed that here was a huckleberry I could clip.

He looks up at me with a pair of big gray eyes that are sharp as razors. His face was freckled and thin and bony. Everything about him was sharp. His head come to a peak, his chin likewise, his ears was pointed and the bones just about stuck through his clothes until he was a human hat-rack. He had more points than a pair of dice, and did not look or talk like a Bible school scholar.

"I can do some business with you," he says. "Meet me in Crane's restaurant on Broadway at seven o'clock tonight."

And he beat it, not wanting to be seen with me. I felt very good, but I kind of sagged when this Tracy mug eases over and suggests that we go back to town together. I can scarcely see him for that lump his gat made. We grab a street car and he settles back in his seat and eases his soft hat down over that long face of his until practically nothing showed but the tip of his beak, his crooked mouth and a lantern jaw that was so big even I could have hit it easy.

I keep wondering where I have seen him, and I am just at the point of asking him some personal questions when he says casual-like—

"How'd you come out with Gower and the jock I seen you talking to?"

Right then and there it come to me. I had seen this guy on the train from New York, slouching back in his seat with his hat just like he was wearing it now. I gets the lay immediately.

"Any news I want to give Johnny Mull I'll give to him direct," I says, and he sits up straight.

"That's what he's wondering about," he says without batting an eye.

There was no doubt in my mind before about Johnny's boys, but if there had been I would not have had none after looking at him. But I am very sore, because I am figuring out some very smart moves and this guy might get in my hair. So I says:

"Are you wearing that rod as a watch-charm or a corset?" Then, because he looks kind of hostile, I adds—"Ha-ha!"

"Don't give me no ha-ha," he says. "You've got me, brother. I am watching out for Johnny. What's the lay, and no fooling?"

"That is my business and Johnny's. I don't know you and I would be very dumb to open my mouth. And if you don't like that, tough guy, get Johnny to call me up and give me the office what to do."

I am very much put out, as I said, but on the other hand I can see that Johnny is serious or this guy would not be checking up on me. He sees he can get nowheres with me and I go to my room and hit the hay.

I AM having breakfast around four o'clock when the phone rings and I answer it in a disguised voice. The voice on the other end belongs to Trigger Toomey.

"I'm here, kid. How's tricks?" he says.

I am surprised how quick he got to town, inasmuch as he was wanted, but I thought very fast.

"Listen," I says, "a hot guy you are. You and Gower is such friends that he will hit you with a Bible on sight. What do you mean by steering me wrong?"

"I figured you could get away with it," he says. "I did know him."

"Well, maybe I will," I says very sore, knowing that he is in enemy territory even if he was so tough. "But if I do it'll be all due to me and not to you. Now don't butt in—I am dealing with the jockey, maybe, and there is just a chance that by very smart manipulation and thinking fast I can pull something off. Where can I find you if I want you?"

He told me kind of humble-like. I felt very good. Class will tell, and here I was in Louisville with millions of dollars depending on me and my brains, and with these two-for-a-cent racketeers and the like realizing how silly it was to try to put something over on Slats Kirke.

So I put on my white flannels and sport shoes and a blue shirt and a blue coat and go down to the barber shop and get shined and manicured and massaged. I stroll into the restaurant and find this jock, Benton, waiting for me. I am doing a great deal of figuring.

He come to the point very quick. His suit was shiny and his shoes wasn't.

"I'm willing to ride Black Diamond so he won't finish in the money," he says.

"That ain't enough," I says back, wondering how he expects to rook me. "My principals have got to be sure that he positively is out of the race. They got to know it exclusive."

"That's silly," he says in his high voice. He is very excited underneath. "I'll guarantee he won't be in the money."

"How much?" I says.

"The fifty grand you offered Old Faithful," he says without batting an eye.

I like to fainted.

"Would you like it now, in hundred-dollar bills, or would you consent to wait an hour and get paid in gold?" I asks him in my best sarcastic vein.

"I'm not kidding," he pipes, his voice breaking. "Put it up somewheres where nobody'll catch on and pay me after the race."

I started to talk with him very nice and fatherly and it did not take long for me to find out that he could be handled very easy and that it would not be hard for me to pick up a nice piece of change for myself without anybody being the wiser. I also saw that although he was twenty-two or three years old that he was not dry behind the ears yet and that old Gower had held him down and he didn't know what it was all about. So I figured Tillie could do wonders, and we end up by going to the show and me making a date for him with her which he was very pleased at and thought I was a very fine fellow.

She was tickled at meeting the famous jockey, although he looked more like he cleaned out the stables.

Anyways, I give her her instructions to string him along and told her she would get plenty. She came by my room about two o'clock and says:

"Listen, Slats, that boy ain't after the money alone. He just loves that horse like it was his brother or somethin' and he figures that the old man is doin' somethin' terrible in runnin' him, because the horse will surely be ruined for good if he runs. Benny is just heartbroken about it."

"I see," I says, starting to figure.

"So he'd made up his mind," Tillie goes on, sitting down on a chair alongside my bed, "on just gallopin' the horse around the track, see? He says it will be a pasteboard track and that the poundin' will be hard on any horse's legs. If he should let Black Diamond out he'll surely break down. He says the old man is screwy—willin' to sacrifice the horse on account of a lot of suckers that bet on him that nobody asked to bet on him anyway. He had made up his mind to just gallop Black Diamond easy before you came along and did not figure on makin' any money on it whatever."

"What?" I yelped. "Why, the double-crossin' rat! Trying to take my dough for something he was going to do any-

way! What a sap I'd be—"

"Now hold your horses," Tillie says. "He is a very sweet boy and he is entitled to some jack."

All of a sudden I am feeling very good as I see how things are opening up and how nice everything is going to be. It takes a guy like me that can command women and has got the front to handle these big deals. As she leaves, Tillie says:

"Don't try to harm Benny either! He is a very sweet boy and I am goin' out to the track with him tomorrow mornin' to see this horse."

"Good," I says. "Keep him on the string."

WELL, I get to thinking and I get busy on the phone right away and finally find Johnny in New York. He O.K's Tracy and hears what I have to say and says he will probably come to Louisville himself and for Tracy to call him up tomorrow afternoon. I didn't like the idea of him coming to Louisville, as I don't like to have anybody gum up my plans or my left partner knowing what I'm doing with my right one. I explained to him that it was just a question of the jockey getting the fifty grand instead of the owner, and I was certainly in ace high with Johnny because the last thing he said was:

"I certainly do want to see what you're doing. I might learn something that would be worth whatever it costs."

Well, the next day I tells Tracy, who is always on my trail, that I have got to give Benton the fifty grand and then I go to Benton and tell him that Tracy will try to beat him down, but to hold out. I introduce the two of them, and Tracy is very much satisfied, although he asks me a very great many questions and acts as though he was not sure that I was acting in an open and aboveboard manner.

Then I start thinking about Trigger Toomey and how easy a wild fellow like him could gum up the works when I am doing all the work and how he will want all the money there is as a result of my being on the job. He was out of sight, but an annoyance like an ingrowing hair. So when he calls up and acts very nasty because I have not reported to him, I act very cordial and tell him about Tillie and make a date to take him to the show.

When I tells Tillie what she's got to do, she balks and says she has a date with Benton and refuses to go. I explain to her how it is to everybody's best interest for her to play Trigger for a sucker. You never can tell about a woman, though. She starts raving about Black Diamond and Benny. I could not tell which she liked best. Finally I have to remind her not to monkey with me by saying:

"You're going to do what I say and no back talk. Don't forget I might talk about where and how you got that ring you are wearing, and that time Freddy Mooney was shot—"

"You louse!" she says, but she knew who was boss.

Trigger shows up in tortoise-shell cheaters and goes for Tillie like a ton of brick when he seen her in the show. I told him what I had done, figuring it would be no harm, but I did not tell him all I intended to do.

So I wait for Tillie in my room, and it was five o'clock before she come in. This made me sore, because tomorrow was the Derby, and Louisville was very excited. The town was a cross between the battle of Verdun and a May Day riot. It makes me sore to think of myself, with the Derby in my pocket, being stuck up in my room waiting for a jane.

When she come in she had a black eye, her hair was all down and she looked like she had been put through a wringer but was still all wet.

"Trigger must have got fresh," I says to her.

"Oh, no," she says with a very bad look in her good eye. "I'm goin' to a masquerade ball. But I'll get even with that blank!"

"Did he talk?" I says.

"And how!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry," I says to smooth her down. "What is it?"

"He's got hold of an old silencer somewheres," she tells me, planting her hands on her hips and smiling. "He's rigged up a gun in a camera box with a silencer attached, got himself fake cre-

dentials as a photographer for some California outfit and he's planning to set up with the other picture men at the finish line. If Black Diamond is winnin' he will shoot him before he reaches the finish while pretendin' to take pictures. He'd make his getaway in all the excitement."

In a flash I seen how easy that would be. Sixty thousand people would be at the Derby—ten thousand of them in the infield alone, and all of them swarming around like a theater crowd in Times Square. Right away I start figuring. See what a dumb guy this Trigger Toomey was, telling all his business to a woman? I did not need Trigger Toomey in my deal, and I decided then and there that I could not have any part in such tactics as he was about to pull.

"Now, listen, Tillie, you ain't gonna do nothing," I told her. "I will see to it myself that Trigger Toomey is caught with the goods on."

Well, it was a job to persuade her. Nobody except me with the stand-in I had with her and my diplomacy could have done it. What she wanted to do was have a chance to tell what she thought of him while he was being arrested, snap the handcuffs on him herself, and then go down to the jail and have two keepers hold him while she scratched his eyes out. But I persuade her that it is all for the best and tell her that as soon as Johnny Mull hit town in the morning, everything would be O.K. I painted a very pretty picture for her and sent her home still talking to herself.

I beat it right out to the track with Tracy on my heels. There must have been two thousand nuts there to see the mules gallop. I waited until I had a chance to talk to Benton in a lunchroom near the track. I told him that at least a thousand dollars of the money should pass before the races and got him all soothed down and told him what he should say to Johnny Mull if he talked to him. He kept talking about the mule and acted as though he was heartbroken because it was ir possible to win a Kentucky Derby with him. He almost put it over me like he had put it over on Tillie that he was doing it for the horse's sake and not for the dough, which was funny, because he was not smart and anybody could tell that he was just a young fellow that did not know what it was all about.

Of course, I did not really expect that Johnny Mull would take a chance on being mixed up personally in any way whatever. In case he did, though, I would have the kid hold out for fifty grand and I would chisel my share out of him later, because he would have been barred off the track for life if I opened my mouth.

Tracy was pretty sore because I had give him the slip, but I says to him:

"Listen, punk, I'm a busy man and I am pulling off a deal and I do not want you and your gat gumming up the works. If you want to trail me around, which you couldn't do if I wanted to lose you or tip off a cop, all right. But I am doing high class business with classy people in a classy and open and aboveboard manner and one look at your mug would spoil everything. I've got the only horse I need and I positively have got no use for jackasses."

"Ha," he says. "But if you try to doublecross me I'll shoot the sign of the cross on your collarbone!"

WELL, that there was a morning. The streets are full of people and so is the lobbies and rooms.

Just as I am about to call Trigger up, in he pops in person, which made me very sore.

"You are taking a terrible chance and we do not want to be connected," I told him. "Everything is according to Hoyle. Now get out, because Johnny will soon arrive in a private car with half the politicians of New York."

"O.K," he growls. "But, listen here, if you try to pull a fast one or take a runout powder I will cut your heart out and make you eat it. I will—"

And on he raves until I have to beat it out, because I had a date with a big shot of the Jockey Club, which I had been very hard put to it to make and only got on account of me being a slick talker. When I start running out it makes Trigger, who is restless hiding out, come to and he says:

"All right. And if Benton goes wrong

we got nothing to worry about. I got the greatest gadget fixed up—"

I cut him off.

"Don't tell me about it. I positively want to know none of your business and you none of mine."

And I scram. I am always looking ahead and when I walk right into the Jockey Club member's office in town I have my story all ready and I am very frank.

"And so," I ends up while he is in the process of starting to throw a apoplectic fit, "I am just a famous sportsman in another racket, but a lover of the horses and a believer in being on the up and up with man or beast. I expect to be protected. I just learnt it from a little actress I know, which is one of the best and smartest dames in the burlesque racket, and all you got to do is pinch Toomey as soon as he gets into the track without no disturbance or anything and I will leave it to the well known Jockey Club how much of a reward I should have, as I know they will be on the up and up with a fellow sportsman like myself."

After several shots of Bourbon and some cigars, I go out again knowing that everything will be all right. It would teach this murdering punk, Toomey, not to blab his business to no janes, and I was safe because I had not let him tell me nothing. He would blame Tillie, see?

Back at the hotel there is a call from Johnny Mull, and I call him up *pronto*. He did not want to see the jock, and the best he would do was give his word for fifty grand total if Black Diamond lost the race.

"I did not take any more money on him," he says, "on account of having done business with you before, so it ain't as big a proposition as it might have been. But it's a lot of dough—"

"How about a thousand in advance for the jock," I starts, and he says—

"Not a quarter till after the race."

"Then how about five hundred for me to bet—"

"Not a dime."

"A hundred, then, Mr. Mull. The expenses have been very big."

"Not a nickel. Fifty grand later, and my word is my bond. And if you double-cross me I will have you followed to China and broke like a dish and—"

"Ha-ha," I says. "How you talk! But everything will be O.K, although you gave your word that it was to be a hundred and fifty grand—"

"If the owner scratched the horse. This is a different proposition entirely."

No sooner was he off the wire than Tillie called up telling me what she would do to me if I doublecrossed her Benny. She was laying off that afternoon to see the race and see Benny ride, even if he was only galloping around the track for the exercise. I said I would take her. Then Tracy calls, and Trigger again, and Benton from some place outside the track, all of them telling me what they would do to me if I pulled a fast one. I had to laugh, as I saw what a reputation I had for being a smart guy.

Well, Tillie shows up. Down in the lobby Tracy is waiting, and we go out to the track. Tillie is made up until she looks like a hand painted statue. I do not look so bad myself in gold pants and a striped shirt. Many's the look that was throwed at us, and I could see that Tracy was knocked off his feet at the people I knew, like actresses and such. He is going strong for Tillie.

I apologize to her for not having had time to get admission to the club house where we would have positively put many of them millionaires in the shade. The photographers are all set up to take pictures of the finishers, and Trigger ain't with 'em, so I know they have nabbed him. He would not dare to squeal on Johnny, or consequently on me. He was not going to spend the rest of his life in jail and, in fact, would have been rubbed out in jail. I was not afraid of Benton on account of him being so nutty about Black Diamond. There was nothing wrong except having to stand around in that crowd and watch a bunch of gee-gees gallop around the track in races that didn't mean nothing.

I had give Tillie the office to give Tracy the works, and by the time the crowbaits was parading for the Derby he was calling her honey and telling her what he could and would do for her. So I slip off, and leave 'em wedged on the rail never missing me. I prowl around

while the crowd cheers the parade and I spot Johnny Mull in a box with a bunch of politicians.

BLACK DIAMOND was the best looking antelope there, and I could see that in the mutuels he was an even money favorite, or maybe even less. And when the race started a quarter of a mile down the track the crowd yells "They're off!" as though they were thirsting for blood, and then everybody starts yelling for Black Diamond.

I see that Benton knew his stuff. Black Diamond was always a slow starter, but this time he looked as though he was left at the post. It didn't mean nothing to the crowd, each and all of which knowed that Black Diamond, if he run his race, would finish far ahead.

They pass the stand, sixty thousand suckers yelling bloody murder, and my turtle is last. Benton has laid him in on the rail and is coming as near to choking him to death as he dared to. I got a little worried. If he done that right in front of the stands I would not have been surprised to see him running the dog backward on the backstretch.

Black Diamond is just galloping, and he could not have hurt his bandaged leg if it had been made of glass. I was feeling very good as I knowed that fifty grand at least was as good as in my pocket.

I kind of tensed up a little when Black Diamond hit the backstretch. He was fighting for his head, and all of a sudden he was in the middle of the track running over horses. The people went nuts, and I started feeling very weak as I seen the turtle passing the field as though the rest of them was running on treadmills.

Then I pretty near faint. I seen Benton let out a wrap. If Black Diamond had been running before, he was flying now. By the time the leaders was going into the far turn Benton had laid Black Diamond against the rail to save ground, and only five lengths off the leaders.

I am so cold my Adam's apple is frostbitten. Then I come to myself again for a minute as I seen Black Diamond dropping back a little. Maybe Benton had just done that run to make things look right and would now pretend Black Diamond had shot his bolt. But so far he had rode a winning race.

Halfway around the turn I seen he was out to win—Black Diamond had dropped back because the crook on his back had give him a breather.

All of a sudden the black horse jumps ahead like a kangaroo that had sat on a needle. He went past them other two so fast the breeze took their breath away. At the eighth pole he was coasting in five lengths ahead of the second horse. Benton was sitting still and coasting faster than any of them other pugs could run downhill, but he wasn't going no faster than I did getting out of the track.

I was too upset to think. I had been doublecrossed by that sniveling jane or that punk of a jockey, or both, or Johnny Mull, or somebody. It was not so much the money, it was the idea of taking advantage like that.

I sneaked through town in case the cops was after me—people like I had dealt with and tried to do favors for would squeal. There was not only not a cop but not a human being on the streets. The first train left for a place called Ogden, Indiana, and there was no other for an hour.

I am feeling very sick, I do not mind telling you, and I could not figure it out. It did not seem possible that that fresh young punk of a jockey could have doublecrossed me, and yet there it was.

Anyways, the first thing was to give Johnny Mull and his boys a chance to cool down a little. So I gets myself placed in this here rube jail in Ogden for petty larceny under a phony name, and two days later I get the answer in a Louisville paper I had sent in to me.

According to the size of the headlines you would have thought Queen Mary had bought a new hat. Toomey had squealed on me and Benton, but not Johnny Mull. He said his camera gun was not to be used, but just to scare Benton into being on the up and up, and said the whole scheme was the result of him and me having run a future book, and not wanting to pay off. I still got the clipping. Read it and weep.

After telling all this and describing the trial it says:

The feature witness of the day was Jockey Benton. The crowded courtroom was silent as the attorney for the defendants said—

"Now tell us your story in your own way."

The gangling youth gazed at his foster-father, Gower, and the famous old character of the track nodded encouragement.

"Both Mr. Gower and myself were certain that Black Diamond would break down in the race, but he insisted that the horse must run for the benefit of the public," the youth said. "I had made up my mind to save him by starting too slowly to strain his leg, and then galloping him easily, keeping him a long distance from the other horses so he could not be bumped, and holding him in to save his leg. I have been with the horse since he was foaled, and I could not bear to think of his racing career being over.

"When the opportunity arose to pick up fifty thousand dollars for Mr. Gower and myself for doing what I intended to do anyway, I tried to take advantage of it, although this man Kirke looked and acted like a crook.

"I carried my plan through as any who saw the race know until we hit the back stretch. Somehow feeling Black Diamond under me crying to run, and starting to run over horses on his own heart alone and despite my efforts to keep him from it, made me forget everything. I had been heartbroken to think that the great horse would never win a Kentucky Derby. All of a sudden it seemed wrong for Black Diamond not to have his chance. I felt as though he was talking to me, saying that he would rather die trying than to be licked.

"So I sat down and rode my race. I forgot that I'd been told I'd be killed if I double-crossed the crooks. It wasn't bravery or anything—I forgot there was anything else in the world but me and the horse and the Kentucky Derby—"

"The good Lord spake in his heart!" shouted old Mr. Gower, and Judge Harmon rapped for order.

Under cross examination Benton's story was not shaken . . .

And so forth. Can you tie that? And right in the next column, wrote by some woman, I see an interview with Tillie La Tour and the first line says, "Mrs. Benjamin Benton, who was Miss Tillie La Tour, vivacious burlesque soubrette until midnight last night when she and the famous jockey were married—"

I didn't read no farther for five minutes.

It shows you never can depend on no woman, even if you consider her your sweetheart. But they always outsmart themselves. Here she goes for a dumb punk because I am away from her for a little while. She gives up her career on the stage when a smart guy like me might have got her on to Broadway.

It is all enough to make a man decide to quit being on the up and up at all times with man or beast and to be crooked like the rest. But I still say that if it had not of been for that Benton guy being a crook who thought like a sucker I would have pulled off everything O.K.

And here everybody ends up sitting pretty except me that saved Toomey murdering somebody and worked very hard for the best interests of all concerned. I can assure Johnny Mull that I wish he would tip off his boys not to bother me, as I would be a very handy lad to have around. And I will not hold it against him that while everybody has been having a good time pulling off many's the deal along Broadway, I have had to sit here in Ogden, Indiana, with nothing but a pair of golf pants.

NOTES FROM A NIGER TRADING STATION

By T. SAMSON MILLER

THE village outside the compound is suddenly quiet. The white man is drawn to his observation post on the balcony, to discover the meaning of the sudden cessation of domestic sounds such as the pounding of grain mortars.

Two White Fathers—they are always in pairs—dressed in long white smocks, sandals and shallow pith helmets are trying to interest the blacks in Christianity. They listen politely, they agree, and they will accept conversion, apparently. It won't hurt to add the white man's god to the worship of the other gods; and it will please the two whites, who have come expressly to tell about their god and heaven. And they ask nothing.

It was very different when a *mahdi*—a Mohammedan fanatic—struck the village three moons ago. It was like a revival meeting. The *mahdi* worked a miracle, which proved the truth and power of the religion he preached. He swallowed live scorpions, which an assistant took from a rush basket and handed to him from time to time as he held forth on the glories of Mohamet. Of course there was a trick in it. The sting of a scorpion in the soft membrane of the throat would cause a swelling and suffocation. The scorpion's sting is in its tail The *mahdi* defty dislocated the tail bone, rendering the scorpions harmless. But it went big with the blacks.

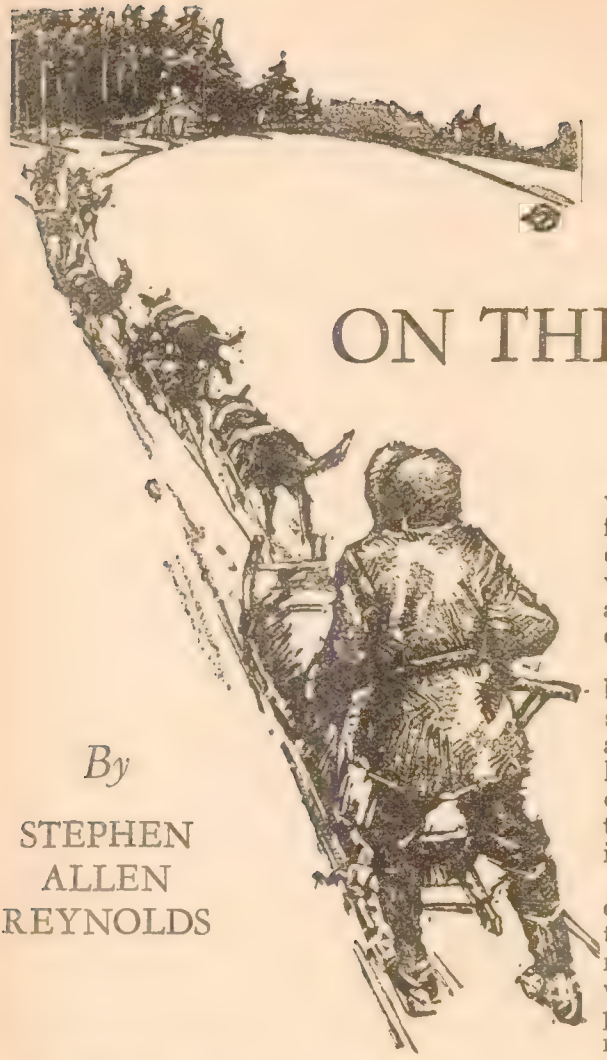
* * *

Today the village was as excited as a beehive when a wasp or dragon fly intrudes. The cause was a negro stranger with pink eyes and white eyelids, yellow skin and white hair. Albinos are rare enough in Africa to be a cause of wonder, and anything sufficiently unnatural to cause wonder is an object of suspicion and dread. An albino negro has a pretty bad time. He is shunned, and hurried along with artful lies. "We have no guest hut. We are sick. We like you; we want you to stay; but we are sick. If you stay with us you will be sick too." They feed the albino their best—not in friendliness or sympathy—but to get on the right side of him lest he give some one the Evil Eye or work witchcraft. Thus, an albino is a homeless wanderer, and he lives by unconscious blackmail.

* * *

The compound had a visitor of frightening mien. Mounted on a black stallion richly caparisoned, the visitor galloped into the compound like a knight of old entering the lists for combat. Ostrich plumes rose from a leather helmet and leather face mask. Over a burnous was a leather cuirass studded with brass knobs. The saddle cloth was a leopard skin. A long gun slung over the back, and a sword in a leather sheath added to the war-like appearance of the visitor. He looked exactly like a Japanese warrior Samurai of old; or like an ancient fighting man of China.

He raised his left arm and shook a clenched fist at the white man. But the station's interpreter said the visitor was of the Shua people, and Shua grasp prayer beads in their left hand, the right being engaged with the reins. But if one who did not know that met a Shua on the trail, and the Shua shook a fist, and the white had a gun and was hasty, things might happen. There are very few instances of Africans having killed whites, and those few arose from the white's misunderstanding.



BAGGED ON THE BARRENS

By

STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

LOWER the March sun sank, touching with palest yellow the snow mantled Barrens where not so much as a dwarfed spruce or stunted jack-pine raised its head. I was ten days north of the "Land of Little Sticks" and, judging by the way things were going, I never expected to see a tree again. For I was quite blind.

At any other time the sun would have been welcome. Now, its rays were caught up and flung back at me from icy hummock and glittering niggerhead, causing an agony unspeakable. I'd been four days without my dark glasses, lost while crossing Chesterfield Inlet, and had been trying to carry on with homemade goggles carved from the shoulder blade of a caribou. The narrow slit cut with infinite pains minimized the amount of light admitted; but even so, it was too much.

Inflammation setting in the day before had grown worse. A thousand red hot needles were digging at my eye sockets. My mittened hand, held close to my face, was quite invisible—had been so for the last hour or two. It looked as if I were through.

Onward to the north, picking out their way, my seven dogs trotted dutifully while I rode in a mental whirl. Through the pain which racked me certain thoughts pricked their way and added to my anguish. I knew only too well what would most likely happen. Within an hour or two the dogs would tire, crouch and watch me while I crawled into my fawnskin sleeping bag. Through the night, if the pangs of hunger outweighed my other suffering, I'd gnaw at a bit of frozen meat and perhaps try to club off the huskies when they raided the sled.

As I figured it out it was fully seventy miles ahead to the nearest Eskimo igloo at Whale Point. And at this season of the year I could look for no stray hunters ranging the Barrens in my vicinity.

No, there was no likelihood of human help in this quarter of the frozen world, and the seventy miles to the nearest

igloo might as well be a thousand. Men suffering from an acute attack of snow-blindness don't recover in a day. In my fur bag I'd lie around a couple of days, perhaps three, and then one of the frequent blizzards would happen along and put an end to it all. When Summer came they'd find some bones gnawed clean, some scraps of sled and hardware, for where furs and rawhide thongs are concerned wolf-dogs are thorough cleaners.

The sun sank. I knew it only by a sense of lessened torture when I faced the south. The speed of the team decreased. The dogs were tired. They knew the hour was at hand when each could expect his ration of frozen salmon-trout, the long, sweet rest in the lee of the snow barrier I'd throw up for the night.

But on this night there'd be no wall of snow, no blizzard proof igloo before which they could line up and wait for their suppers.

"Next stop is the last," I told myself aloud, and right away resolved to put it off as long as possible.

A miracle might happen. I might encounter a stray hunter of bear or musk-ox. I might even overhaul Ben Singer, fugitive from justice, despite his twenty-four-hour start on me from Churchill. And so, trying to convince myself that these faintest of chances would develop into something more than imaginings born of suffering, I shouted at the tired dogs and tried to crack the long whiplash over them.

For awhile we slipped along at an eight-mile pace, then I gave up trying to use the whip. There was no use cracking it at random, to pluck an eye from a dog perhaps, or to divert the animals toward salt water ice where a protruding reef might fetch earlier disaster. So I tucked the short whipstock under one of the load thongs and sat holding on with both mittened hands.

Slowly, now, we rumbled on across thick drum-ice where retreating water had left strange hollows. Here the steel shod runners gave off unearthly music, again to resume their whine when the low spots were passed and the way led slightly upward. The aurora was busy now. I couldn't see its gorgeous banners, its opalescent shimmering, but I sensed the rhythm of its pulsing, the crackling whisper of its low pitched voice. Many times since coming North and joining the Mounted I had watched and listened to the aurora, but never before had it spoken to me. Now it mocked and reviled me. From an invisible sky a voice lashed out and penetrated to my tortured brain.

"Byron Doud," came staccato words, "you're a copper who's not going to get his man. After the dogs have chewed their traces and eaten you, they'll find their way back to the police kennel. Don't worry about your grave. The dogs leave only the skull and the big knobs of the thigh bones. Next Summer the buttercups will grow up through those eye sockets that hurt you so now. Some Eskimo will find your nickel-plated whistle and your rusty guns."

On and on the horrible chatter sputtered. I wasn't quite mad. Through some saving quality of my mental processes I knew the mocking song was but the product of my imagination and pain. I realized too that the dogs had stopped again, that it had seemingly grown warmer, that there was moisture in the air.

Far off toward the southeast I heard the thundering of heavy ice against the floe edge—perhaps twenty miles away. I knew what that meant. Wind had arisen. It had blown back to the floe edge the drifting fields which the last gale from the west had torn from the granite basins of inlet and unprotected cove. The thundering increased. Soon the wind would be upon us, and wind from that quarter meant snow and a possible blizzard.

"Byron Doud," the aurora whispered hoarsely, "you're through."

It was the last word, for now the wind came with its promised snow. Gently at first, like a lover bearing flowers, it floated up from the southeast, rich with huge white flakes. The aurora died; the wind strengthened and came moaning in from across the distant open water. The soft hissing of driven snow now gave its undertone to the overture of death, and I knew the stage was set for my farewell appearance.

All too soon the wind would gather

in volume and come howling along, an icy blast before which no unsheltered creature might expect to live. Even the sleeping bag would be useless, for between stitches and into the smallest apertures the death dealing cold has a way of penetrating.

I fumbled mechanically at the lashings, but couldn't manage the knots. With one mitten off, I had better luck, and soon flung back the hide which covered the load. I was tugging at the bedding roll when a long-drawn howl from one of the dogs startled me. Soon another dog followed suit, and presently the whole team was howling as I'd never heard dogs howl before.

A pre-supper song was unusual. It was as yet too early for the almost nightly chorus with which huskies greet the moon, the stars, their wolf cousins or whatnot, and I stood listening and wondering until the frost bit at my bare hand and warned me to cover it. Still wondering, I drew on my mitten and heaved a couple of frozen fish toward the dogs. Immediately the howling ceased, to be followed by a different kind of uproar.

Deep throated growls and snarls now drowned the voice of the rising gale. I threw more fish. The fighting stopped. And as the harnessed huskies crunched and bolted their more than liberal ration I spread my biggest robe under the lee runner of the sled and began to work my way into the sleeping bag. Once well inside it I'd reach out and draw the bulk of the robe over me. Then—let come what would.

But a far-off howling stayed my fingers. I thought of the wolf pack, then dismissed the idea. At this season there'd be nothing so close to salt water to tempt a wolf. The caribou were all down below the timberline. And the stray herds of musk-ox were several days' sledding inland. This was the territory of the bear, the seal, the walrus—alike impossible to the predatory wolf of the Barren Lands.

"Can I possibly be hearing other dogs?" I asked myself as I distinguished notes which must have issued from more than a single throat.

The moaning wind answered me. The howling died away, and as the last crunching sounds came from nearby, a comparative silence settled down. I finished crawling into my bag and rolled the rug around me as best I could. And now, relaxed, I thought no more of dogs, for maddening pain was again blotting out thought of all else. I sensed vaguely that dogs were walking over me, fighting among themselves while raiding the sled.

More intense became the cold, and then the red hot needles stabbing at my eyes turned white hot. I remember no more, for a warm and velvety blackness enfolded me.

I WAKENED at the touch of fingers on my forehead, then all but screamed aloud—for some one seemingly had poured melted lead into my eye sockets. I writhed and threw up my arms.

"Take it easy," a deep voice growled, and a pair of muscular hands restrained me from tearing the bandages over my eyes.

The wiry fingers sank into the flesh, holding my wrists firmly; and then, as little streams of moisture trickled down my temples, the worst of the agony passed. Immediately senses other than eyesight began to function. I realized that I was in a tent or igloo. Some good Samaritan had rescued me and tied ice over my eyes. That was what was melting and trickling down. I could smell the savory odor of hot food and, between blasts howling by our shelter, I could hear the hiss of a vapor stove.

So far, so good; but now the question of the identity of my host arose. He was a white man, for he'd spoken to me in a brand of English impossible of duplication by a Kenipatoo or Innuit. And he was big and strong. And, most important of all, while I could feel the thumb and fingers of his right hand at my left wrist, there was a different grip around the other. I could distinguish pressure of neither thumb nor forefinger. Three wires seemingly held my wrist against the base of a horny palm. I knew now. It was the man I'd been sent to fetch back. Ben Singer, killer of his trapper partner, was minus the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. I stiffened, then relaxed and for the mo-

ment forgot my pain. The hands fell away from my wrists.

"Have a snort o' rum, Doud," came the next words, and I felt the touch of glass at my lips.

I took a mouthful, wondering. It was H. B. Standard, 150 proof, and burned like liquid fire. I sat up sputtering.

"You know me?" I managed to gasp.

"Sure I know you. You're Doud o' the Mounted. I seen you last Summer down at The Pas. You was shaved slick. You had a red coat on, an' shiny boots."

"And two good eyes," I supplemented.

The killer laughed unmusically. A pan clattered, a spoon tinkled, and I took advantage of the moment to struggle partly erect and thrust out an exploring hand. My bare fingers touched the moist surface of a block of snow. Overhead where the ascending warmth from the stove had fuller play, the roof of snow was actually wet. I knew then that I was in a small igloo—one such as experienced men build hastily for an emergency stop on the trail. In such a shelter, built thickly at the top, a constant melting follows the lighting of a fire. Moisture trickles down the arching walls, freezing at the crevices and sealing the interior against the searching cold.

"Have some soup, Doud," the fugitive invited me presently, and handed me a tin cup.

Savory steam floated up from its contents. I sipped, cautiously at first, then eagerly. And meanwhile I could sense Ben Singer sitting near me.

"You know me?" he inquired gruffly after a little time.

There was no use pretending. It might be well to have an understanding.

"You're Ben Singer," I said, "wanted for murder. You had a full twenty-four-hour start from Churchill. Whatever delayed you was a lucky break for me."

"Bust a sled runner crossin' Chesterfield Inlet," the fugitive growled in explanation. "Tried to make up for it by mushin' half the night. I just get this igloo done an' am crawlin' in out o' the weather, when along you come an' stop half a mile back. Your dogs an' mine mix it up. They've et all your grub. They was about to start in on you."

The ice at my eyes had melted, and as the pain increased I must have rolled my head or given other sign of distress. Almost immediately Singer was at my side with cooling lumps. One instant of agony as the bandage was raised, and then a grateful coolness followed.

"Now that you *got* me, what'll you do with me?" the killer asked.

The grim humor, the rumbling chuckle from the deep chested fugitive, were alike embarrassing and humiliating. I knew little about the fellow save that he was a free lance trader and trapper who for years had roved the Barrens and extracted a living from its naked wastes. I knew little of his crime. I knew only that he had killed, and that it had been my job to fetch him in.

"What are you going to do with *me?*" I countered after a little thought.

A brief silence followed during which Singer lighted his pipe. Then he found and filled my own briar with black shag and placed it in my hands.

"Pull!" he said, and held a sulphur match for me.

I drew. A rather agreeable sensation of dizziness came as I inhaled my first mouthful of smoke in several days. The dizzy feeling passed, and presently the tobacco was working its customary magic.

"There's only one thing I can do," Singer went on to say, "an' that's to treat you just like I would any other feller I picked up blind on the trail. I'll ride you to Whale Point an' get some milk into them eyes. If there's too much swellin' an' pus starts gatherin' under the lids, you might lose both eyes. After I get you into an igloo an' dig up a wet nurse, I'm goin' to pull out. I'll be gone before you can see enough to count your fingers."

Gratitude and duty fought for the upper hand. The killer had unquestionably saved my life. Now, of his own free will, he was proposing to take me to a place where my eyes could be cared for. Whatever his failings, a man like that couldn't be entirely bad. Point by point I went over what I could do, what promises I could make and keep, and as our pipes burned low I reached a decision.

"Singer," I said, "I've got a few dollars banked down at Winnipeg. The money's yours for legal expenses, or any other purpose. It's my job to take you back. If I fall down they'll send other troopers after you. You can't get away and keep away—not in a country like this. Better come back with me and stand—"

"To hell with your lawyers and courts," Singer broke in angrily. "I live my life my own way. I killed a man—yes! I trusted him to go out an' market our year's catch. Instead o' comin' back he runs off. I look for him month after month an' find him hidin' way down in Quebec. He puts up a fight—tries to knife me. I leave him with his own steel through his rotten heart, an' beat it for Churchill. I lose a year's work. An' top o' that you want to put irons on me an' stick my head in a noose."

A bitter laugh rang out, but in it I read no personal animosity toward me. I was merely a cog in the machine of law and order, and it was the machine as a whole Ben Singer distrusted.

Vainly I argued with this crude son of the North, and in the end fell asleep. We were agreed upon little or nothing. For the present I was completely in his power.

Pain soon wakened me. I cooled the bandage against the snow wall and replaced it. It relieved me. Alternately dozing and listening to the snoring fugitive, I passed what was left of the night.

By noon next day the gale had moderated and given signs of dying out entirely. A fit of moodiness came over the killer as the day wore on. He spoke but little, and then only when he was attending to my bandages or serving drink or food. I hoped he was thinking over my offer.

MORNING of the second day broke, marked for me only by the renewed hissing of the Primus and the aroma of coffee. I heard Singer wriggling out of the low passageway. When he returned he brought news that the wind had hauled into the north. No snow was falling.

"We mush," he said, and after coffee and flapjacks he helped me into my gear.

"I can only find six o' your dogs," he reported when we'd wriggled our way through the arched opening and stood erect. "Back where I found your sled there's some bunches o' hair an' bloodstains. I noticed all the dogs were mighty paunchy yesterday mornin'."

I understood. It was no new experience to wake up minus a dog or two, particularly after a fight or a raid. I turned my face against the keen wind, and was led to a seat on the sled. There followed a day of torture I'll never forget.

A double team of dogs ahead, an empty sled bumping behind, we slipped swiftly along and made few stops. Night fell, and I sensed the crackling of the aurora. Again it seemed to chatter to me of things unpleasant. I was on a long road—a road with no ending. On and on we flew, and delirium touched me. I remember vaguely a brief halt, an icy bandage and a long pull from the flask of fiery rum. Later—much later—I remember hearing a babble of sound. I distinguished the guttural tones of the Eskimo tongue, heard Singer making inquiry as to where a woman could be found with child at breast. Some one answered him, then I was lifted bodily and taken into an igloo.

Presently the bandage was removed from my eyes. A few moments of fresh agony as my lids were forced gently apart, and then the warm drops began to fall and work their spell. Within twenty minutes practically all pain had left me. Shortly afterward I fell into a deep and natural sleep.

Next day the treatments were continued and I began to see dimly. I could distinguish neither faces nor features, but could make out that the sun's rays were filtering in through the square of fresh-water ice set in the southerly wall of the igloo. Slowly but surely my condition improved, and as the day wore on I was able to tell the difference between the form of the tall and muscular killer and the squat and more rounded figures of my Eskimo hosts. As evening came and I finished a dish of boiled seal meat, Singer drew near.

"I'm pullin' out in the mornin'," he said after a little hesitation. "I'm leavin' you your dogs an' all your gear—

all except the cartridges. What'll you do?"

I had no immediate answer, for gratitude and duty were playing tug-o'-war within me.

"You're foolish, Singer," I said at length, "for there's only two trails out of here a man and dogs can live on. And no matter which way you go, even if you keep away for a year, each one of those trails leads to Winnipeg. If I don't fetch you back, some other trooper will."

"You can report me dead—frozen an' buried. Then I can make Cumberland Sound an' get away this Summer on one o' them Scotch whalers."

I shook my head slowly.

"Too many natives in on it. You'd better turn back and let me hire a good lawyer for you. My bankroll is yours for the asking. You're more than welcome to—"

A deep chested oath cut me short.

"I'm pullin' out in the mornin', Doud. Mebbe by that time you can see well enough to chase me. Don't follow too close on the trail, though. 'Twon't be healthy."

The big fellow laughed and turned away, but at a word from me he halted.

"Listen," I said, "you've lost two days taking care of me. I'll stake you to the same start. Go ahead and pull out if you must. And no matter how well I can see I'll sit tight for two full days and nights. Then I'll hit your trail."

"Mind the .30-30's!" came the killer's parting retort.

I saw no more of him that evening, but thanks to the nursing my vision next morning was so improved that I slipped out to watch the departure. Singer's heavily laden sled was nearby, and while the fugitive went about adjusting the traces of his dogs, a little group of natives stood watching.

A dull, familiar pain in my eyes apprised me that the sun was rising and firing the white wastes, yet I lingered long enough to see the huskies rise and strain at their harnesses. A hoarse call of farewell, a musical squealing of sled runners over the hard packed snow, and Ben Singer drove away—almost into the eye of the sun.

THANKS to Yankee whalers who had in former years wintered at nearby Depot Island, there were spare snow goggles in the igloos at Whale Point. With a pair of these, together with a Winchester borrowed to replace my own useless rifle, I breathed a little easier when early in the morning of the second day I set out on the trail. Half of the inhabitants of the village were gathered to see me off; and last of all to bid me "*Tab-bow-hoo-dee!*" was Tiglikpoo, husband of Taleekwah, provider of the milk which had helped save my sight.

I called to the dogs and drove away. Human sounds behind me grew fainter, and presently nothing disturbed the Arctic stillness save the soft pattering of huskies' feet and the smooth swish of sled runners. Again I was alone and on a dangerous trail.

During my two days of waiting I'd decided that Singer wouldn't attempt the western crossing of the Barrens to the Great Bear Lake and Mackenzie River country. He couldn't pack food enough. And at this season of the year it would be practically impossible to live off the country. The caribou were mostly down in the Land of Little Sticks, and with the exception of a few ptarmigan, there was no bird life. There were, of course, no berries. Salmon-trout could be taken on distant lakes and river crossings; but no fugitive could be expected to delay flight to chop through ten or twelve feet of ice, keep himself and a ravenous team of working dogs supplied with fish, and yet make speedy progress. It wasn't in the cards.

Ben Singer knew this. And he knew also that to preserve life and carry on he must keep to the salt water ice where walrus and seal could be taken at this season. With fat for his fires and flesh for himself and dogs he could keep on indefinitely and perhaps win Cumberland Sound on the Atlantic seaboard. Scotch whalers out of Peterhead were always to be found wintering there, and with the earlier break-up of the ice it would be no difficult trick for Singer to buy or steal a whaleboat, a roomy native *omiak*, and drop down to the Labrador. He might eventually reach Europe or the States and be lost en-

tirely to us.

Already I'd threshed the problem out and arrived at a conclusion now doubly supported. Not only had Singer driven away to the eastward. He had kept this course. Below the shelving beach where the tide had fallen and left huge slabs of ice in a jumble I lost his tracks for a few hundred feet, but picked them up again on the smooth ice beyond.

Level as a billiard table, carpeted with a foot of hard packed snow, Sir Thomas Roe's Welcome lay ahead of me, a frozen strait forty to fifty miles wide, beyond which Southampton Island corked loosely the bottleneck top of Hudson Bay. The sun was well up now, and as the dogs scampered eastward across the dazzling waste I gave thought to the future.

Southampton, more than half as large as Ireland, was barren and uninhabited. Singer, in his right senses, would make no attempt to cross it on his way to Cumberland Sound. Rather he'd skirt the island, hugging roughly the floe edge where he could find meat. I could expect, therefore, sooner or later to see his sled tracks bear off to the right. There, far distant, I could already see the low clouds of vapor which invariably hang over waters unfrozen the year around.

As I stopped to give the dogs a breathing spell and snatch a short smoke, a distant and familiar rumbling came to me from a point almost directly ahead. Heavy ice was moving. It might be the Winter floe tearing at the grounded ice behind the outer reefs of Southampton, I reflected, but took little comfort in the thought. Open water spelled detour and extra danger. It meant also that I'd lose the actual trail of the fugitive, and not be likely to pick it up again.

Frost bit at my bare hands, warning me that I'd neglected to draw on my mittens after stuffing and lighting my pipe. I attended to this, and drove on. Far ahead of me I glimpsed a miniature berg frozen in what I judged to be about the center of the Welcome. Singer's sled tracks held straight for this, and when I reached the lee of the little mountain of ice I found signs that he'd stopped there for a smoke. I wasted little time over the burned match and discarded tobacco sack, but pressed on.

Heavier and heavier grew the rumbling after I'd covered the first mile. Intermittent crashes and deep pitched grindings punctuated the uproar, and presently I could distinguish sounds coming from the northeast. These could have but one meaning: The southerly end of the Welcome had been smashed by floes driven up from the unfrozen Bay. How far north one could find firm ice stretching across to Southampton was a problem to be solved only by travel—perhaps a score of miles, perhaps a hundred. Even as I pondered, and before I'd covered the second mile beyond the imprisoned berg, the vapor of open water loomed ahead and I came to the end of the trail.

The dogs slackened speed, stopped and crouched. I walked the few paces remaining between the sled and the edge of the ice, and stared across a green lane fully two miles wide. Some black dots stood out against the dazzling white of the distant ice, and I daresay my heart skipped a beat or two as I unslung my glasses and focused them. They proved to be seal—and the only living objects in sight.

I stood for awhile watching the dogs lick their paws, and presently glanced back along my trail. The little berg stood glistening under the lowering sun, and at sight of it I decided to build an igloo and camp for a day or two. Rather than mush northward an uncertain distance I'd take chances on the gap filling and making possible a direct dash across. An easterly or southerly wind would jam the mouth of the Welcome with heavy ice, and with reasonable care a fellow could cross in safety to the grounded floes along Southampton's coast. I spoke to the dogs, and soon we were on the back trail.

On the southerly side of hillocks and hummocks one usually finds a drift of snow suitable for igloo blocks, and at one side of the miniature berg I found an ideal bank for my purpose. Within half an hour I was finishing a house big enough to stand up in, and with the passing of a few more minutes I'd moved in my gear and started a fire. I fed the dogs, ate heartily myself, piled high the

basin of the stone lamp with strips of seal blubber, then pulled off my *koolitang* and beat the last particle of snow from it.

IT WAS comforting to lie back in the growing warmth and watch the long yellow flame begin the tracing of its smoke pattern on the curving roof. I finished my pipe, drowsed for awhile, then fell to thinking of Ben Singer. Where was he now? Had he gotten across before the breaching of the Welcome? Or could it be possible that he was adrift on a cruising floe, which sooner or later would touch grounded ice and permit his escape? No great dangers attended such drifting, for the snow blanketed floes provided both food and drink for the experienced hunter, and life could be maintained indefinitely.

A disloyal thought came to me. I found guilty relief at the prospect that the killer would get entirely away, or meet his fate at hands other than mine. He'd saved my life—my eyesight. Who was I that I should follow him across the snows, chancing a duel with rifles, hoping to creep up on him and take him prisoner while he slept? Duty was really damnable in this instance.

Let happen what might, there was one course I'd not pursue: I'd never go back and face my commissioner and say:

"I've the honor to report that the man you sent me after picked me up on the trail and saved my life. In payment, I let him go."

I had no right to make such a reward. I felt mean and small, and in my extremity reached for my pipe. For a long while I lay smoking and listening to the vibrant purring of the aurora. Now and then a distant rumbling sound penetrated the thick walls of my shelter. A husky's faint howl is the last I remember of the night.

Sunlight streamed through the chinks around the snow block at the entrance, but it wasn't the light which awakened me. Rather it was a deep pitched grinding from close at hand. The floor of the igloo trembled to a shock, and far and wide over Roe's Welcome a salvo as of heaviest artillery announced the meeting of floes. It was intensely cold, and as I drew aside the barrier block and peered down the short tunnel I sensed the northeast wind whipping around the corner of the berg just beyond. Wind meant a jamming of the gap, a closing of the green lane between me and the grounded ice of Southampton.

I lighted the big lamp, filled a pot with snow and, while waiting for tea water, donned my furs. I'd just drawn tight and knotted the ankle thongs of the doeskin slippers I wore over my mukluks when a hellish uproar drove me from the igloo.

My first thought was that the berg had torn loose or that the entire Welcome was breaking up. But the berg stood motionless as ever, its head reared proudly against a background of blue mottled with scudding clouds. Beyond it, however, lay an open sea where none had been the night before. Patches of heavy ice spun and whirled and ground against the lip of the solid floe almost at my feet, while whitecaps dappled the smoky blue of the water beyond.

It was a spectacle—a sight for the gods. I raised the hood of my *koolitang* against the keen wind and watched a thousand-acre field bear down. Slowly, majestically, it closed in and ground to powder some projecting points. A thundering was borne down the wind, and again the ice trembled beneath my feet.

There was no immediate danger to me. Firm ice was around and behind me. Presently the wind would drop and the ice fields cease their battling. Then I could carry on.

Thoughts of my boiling kettle came. I was about to turn and make my way back to the igloo, when what appeared to be moving dots on the drifting ice arrested my attention. Too closely grouped and moving too rapidly to be seal, I reflected as I hastened to get my glasses and bring them to bear.

Dogs and a laden sled leaped into my vision. A man bundled in furs was at the rear end of the sled. I drew a finer focus, and as I recognized Ben Singer's bulky figure, I stiffened, then hastened to fetch the borrowed Winchester. The moment had come.

I can't say whether the killer saw me

and swerved from the course he'd been holding, but as I left the igloo, rifle in hand, neither sled nor dogs were in sight. I stared in amazement, wondering if my ailing eyes were playing me tricks, when from an indentation in the slowly moving floe I glimpsed open water and the bobbing heads of man and dogs. Now I knew what had happened. They'd come upon a stretch of "young" ice and broken through. Even as I grabbed the long dog whip and ran toward the spot marked by flashing paws, it occurred to me that Ben Singer was about at the end of his rope.

He'd fallen a victim to one of the greatest perils of Arctic travel. In strong winds and at low temperatures, it means death to fall overboard at that season and in those latitudes. Ice forms almost in the twinkling of an eye; and even to escape death by drowning is to be imprisoned in an iron-like shroud. The legs of the trousers freeze first. Running very far is impossible. Unless human help is near, together with shelter and dry clothing, it means the end.

It had been my intention to gain the edge and fling the thirty-foot whiplash for Singer to grasp if possible; but before I'd covered fifty yards the dogs had climbed out on firm ice, the sled trailing along behind them. Its load had fallen off in the water, but at the rear, his mittened hands freezing in a death-like grip, Singer was dragging along.

I shouted at the dogs to swerve them toward the berg. They obeyed, pulled up at the door of the igloo, and as my own huskies gathered around with bristling ruffs and half bared fangs, I hastened to care for the fugitive. There was no motion left in him. He sprawled, an inert heap, with closed eyes. I slashed his hands free of the frozen mittens and made shift to drag him inside. The fire was still burning, and what little water was left was boiling furiously. Quickly I cut through drawstrings and thongs and proceeded to strip Singer of his icy shell.

The roomy *koolitang* offered no great problem, but the mukluks had to be slit along their seams. A violent shiver racked the big frame as I hauled off the last garment and reached for one of my own dry robes. When I turned from feeding the lamp-stove the fugitive's eyes were open. His teeth were chattering noisily. As he stared up at me he attempted speech, and at the movement of the benumbed lips an icicle slipped from his drooping mustache. I bent to my work.

THE killer's condition was by no means serious. The frost hadn't bitten far into him, and so the free use of hot water was permissible. Within a quarter of an hour Singer had stopped shivering, and in another twenty minutes he was actually flexing his arms and legs and eyeing me with a grateful look.

"Well, Ben," I said, "it looks like the game's up. I gave you the full two days. The wind brought you back to me."

"Never got within ten mile o' Southampton," he grumbled. "The floe bust off deeper into the Welcome than I ever knew it to. I cruise north an' south for forty-eight hours, then I sink through a crust that looks like it's got twelve feet o' ice under it."

"Your load's gone," I told him softly, "but your dogs and sled are O.K."

He asked no questions. He knew without my explaining that whatever had been lost from the sled would now be at the bottom of the Welcome. Rifle, cartridges and stove, bundled with the lighter furs and supplies, would take all beneath the surface.

A moody silence enveloped the fugitive. His deepset brown eyes followed me as I fed the stove and turned his wet garments on the rack above the flame. As the drying-out proceeded I dug out needle and sinew with which to sew the slit seams of the mukluks and repair the slashed mittens. Now, for the first time in an hour, Ben spoke.

"Gimme," he growled, and stretched forth a hairy arm for the sewing materials.

I turned them over to him. He hitched closer to the stove, and with a robe draped around his shoulders, stripped off a shred of sinew and threaded the needle with woman-like skill. For awhile I watched his flying fingers, then went outside to look over

the dogs.

I'd already freed Ben's huskies from their harnesses. They lay around licking and gnawing at their ice clogged paws. They had shaken every bit of moisture from their heavy coats, and were little the worse for their bath. Farther away, my own animals crouched and watched in sulky silence. It was cold, bitterly cold, and as the piercing wind nipped at my ears and fingers I lingered but for a brief glance or two around.

Behind me, on the back trail to Whale Point, the sun was sinking into a sea of white fire. Ahead of me, toward Southampton, no fleck of blue or green was now visible across the seemingly unbroken floe. The gaps had closed. The bridge across the Welcome, save for triangular patches where young ice would form, was again in place. Thoughtful, I stooped and wormed my way into the little igloo.

I fixed the snowblock into the low opening and straightened up. Singer had finished his first seam and was kneading and chewing the stiffness from the boot. His eyes questioned mine, but I volunteered no information. As long as he remained aloof and sulky, he'd find me the same. After all, he was my prisoner.

But was he in fact my prisoner? Again and again the question obtruded as I went about feeding the dogs and making snug for the night. As far as outward appearances were concerned Ben Singer might now have been my pal of the trail. I'd made no formal statement of arrest to him. I simply took it for granted that, his outfit gone, he'd go along quietly—at least as far as Whale Point. There I'd have to watch my step, for food and arms were available for renewed flight.

We ate in silence, Singer thoughtful and scowling, I alert and wondering what deviltry was in his mind. I knew the man well enough to reason that after what had passed between us he'd not grab the Winchester and shoot me down in cold blood. Nor could he continue his flight and take me with him to Cumberland Sound. There was but one alternative. He might take it into his head to pull out and leave me with the bare essentials to reach Whale Point. There'd be a fight. And with hot blood a factor the Winchester might play a part. If it did, the man with the gun would win.

Thoughts of the gun came to me again and again as I spread a robe and curled up on the bench of snowblocks. I could feel the prisoner's back against my own. He lay quietly at first; then as the flame in the stove-lamp died and darkness came he stirred slightly every now and then. Perhaps he too was thinking of the Winchester—and the morning.

Firearms may not be kept in a snow-house. The metal attracts and gathers moisture, which freezes later and locks the moving parts. Just now the loaded gun in its sheath of hair sealskin rested outside and atop the igloo. As the night wore on and the aurora purred and crackled outside, a plan occurred to me. It involved not only the gun, but other essentials of travel in the Far North. Not until I'd mulled over the probabilities and weighed carefully practically all the possibilities, did I fall asleep.

IN THE twilight of early morning I dressed and slipped outside. The wind had died away. All was cold and still and white, save for the blue berg looming nearby, and a band of faint orange on the horizon across the Welcome. From the purple shadows under the lee of the berg some huskies rose, shook themselves and stretched. Two of them, more curious than the others, stalked near and watched me as I went about carrying out my plan.

I made as little noise as possible, and within the space of five minutes or so was back in the igloo warming my cold fingers. As the flame mounted higher, giving more light, I saw that Singer was not only awake, but partly dressed. He had already pulled on his mukluks, his fawnskin shirt and trousers, and as our eyes met I sensed he was working the stiffness out of his heavy *koolitang*.

No morning greeting passed between us, and as I proceeded with the next step of the plan my heart beat a little faster. Two skin sacks of dog food stood on end near the entrance. One

after the other I slid them through the low archway, Singer watching incuriously. He thought, I daresay, that I was beginning the loading of a sled. But quickly he was undeceived, for as I dumped the contents of the two bags and called, *"Kyminkl Kyminkl"* fifteen huskies streaked toward the frozen fish and fell upon it fang and claw. Almost within the time it takes to tell it a fortnight's trail rations had slipped down the red maws and three of the bigger wolf-dogs were in a battle royal. At the risk of losing a hand or a foot I pried and kicked them apart—and turned to face Ben Singer.

"What in hell you doin'?" he demanded, his eyes flashing over the dogs and then fixing me with a truculent stare.

"I've dished out all the dog grub," I answered as calmly as possible. "We'll get more on our way back through Whale Point."

"Nothin' doin'," Singer declared explosively. "There's no such thing as 'we' from now on. I'm takin' all the gear except your dogs an' sled. Pull your own freight for Whale Point."

In spite of the tension of the moment a little thrill of satisfaction touched me. I'd doped it out just right. I put my thoughts into words.

"Ben," I said quietly, "you can't carry on. The firing pin of that rifle's broken. You couldn't—"

The killer leaped for the Winchester, whipped it from its sheath and worked the lever. A brief examination, and he dropped the useless weapon and faced me. His nostrils were working. A great rage possessed him. Were I to stave off a battle of fists, a beating, I had to work quickly and with soothing effect.

"You see how it is, Ben," I went on. "A fellow can't hold a gun over a prisoner and cook and harness dogs and all that—not unless he ties his man up and treats him like a side of beef. I didn't want to handle you that way. I didn't feel 'twould be necessary. And so for your own sake I made it impossible for you to go on. There's the gun—useless. The blade of the snow knife is in three pieces. You've got no harpoon, and nothing to make one out of. You couldn't reach the Upper Savages at this season without a snow knife. And there's no grub for the dogs. We can make Whale Point in a few hours. It's the only thing left to do."

For an instant or two I thought Ben had seen the light and that all was well; but as he raised his eyes from taking in the fragments of the snow knife I saw a look on his face that told me I was mistaken. One inarticulate oath escaped him, his mouth twisted convulsively, and he leaped toward me and struck.

It was a wild left hook from the mutilated fist. It landed just below the heart and knocked me sprawling over the runners of one of the upturned sleds. There was steam behind that blow, and if it hadn't been for the cushioning furs I fully believe I'd have passed out. As it was I scrambled quickly to my feet and prepared for the worst. It flashed across me that I was no match for the big trapper. He was a few years older than I, but those years had seasoned and toughened him. Should he get me into a clinch where he could bring into play his piano-wire tendons, he'd hurt me badly. In his rage he might even kill me.

I dodged the first rush as he skirted the sled, but with astonishing agility he whipped around and swung a haymaker. I ducked that and backed off. Singer followed nimbly. I was in a bad spot.

There was no time to reason or plan. In my extremity I acted instinctively. Brain cells long sluggish stirred and flashed a message which set me hopping and catching the rhythm of Singer's advance. Much depended on correct timing. Intuitively I was carrying out the preliminary movement of the "four-in-one".

It's not a pretty thing—*le quatre-dans-un*—and is never used in fair fighting. A rough-and-tumble lumberjack had taught me the trick several years before while vacationing in Quebec. It had interested me. Compared with eye gouging and ear biting it was both humane and scientific, although its victim was usually borne away on a stretcher or shutter. I'd never used it before, but had not forgotten my thorough drilling in it. Now I proceeded to put it into

play.

Instead of retreating, I advanced, stiffened for the shock. Timed to a nicety, so that the momentum of each of us would count to the utmost, I raised my knee, lowered my head, and with every ounce of my weight behind the blows, lashed out with both fists.

My knee caught him in the pit of the stomach, close to the spot chosen for my left fist. My right landed directly over his heart. Simultaneously, the muscles of my jaw and neck rigid, the crown of my head crashed against the point of his jaw.

It was a knockout. Singer grunted, wilted, then toppled backward and crumpled to the hard packed snow. He lay as the dead lie. One might have counted ten or thirty or fifty over him for all he'd hear or care. Nevertheless I hurried, for I had considerable to do. It was out of the question, unaided, to drag on his heavy *koolitang,* so as Mexicans roll a tamale in cornhusks, I rolled Ben Singer in my biggest square of fawnskin and managed to get him on top of a sled. I tucked a smaller robe around his feet and ankles, made a pillow of his *koolitang* and hurried with the lashing.

I drew tight the final knot of the walrus hide thong, and still neither sound nor movement came from my prisoner. But he was breathing. He'd come around. Meanwhile he was protected against the cold, and I was safe from his superior strength. Now, for the first time, I became conscious of a swollen lip, where during the shock of our meeting a fist had taken effect. I was examining the minor injury, when suddenly I forgot all about it. For the killer's eyes had opened. Dazedly at first, he peered around without moving his head.

When his eyes finally met mine, he looked at me long and fixedly. Beneath the layers of furs I detected a squirming, a straining against the bonds. Suddenly he quieted and spoke huskily.

"Takin' me in, just like a side o' beef," I heard him say.

"You don't have to go back that way," I told him.

The deep eyes studied me. I read an unspoken question in them.

"Give me your promise not to make a break," I explained, "and I'll trust you free—from here to Churchill."

The eyes closed, but not for long. A deep swallow, a sheepish grin, and Ben spoke.

"You got me, Doud," he said in low, husky tones. "If you feel like takin' a chance, I promise. You're white."

I stooped quickly to the knots, untied them and helped with the unrolling. Ben rose stiffly and, after stretching and rubbing himself, struggled into his *koolitang.* For a few moments he looked eastward across the Welcome at the rose-gold of sunrise. Now another crucial moment was at hand.

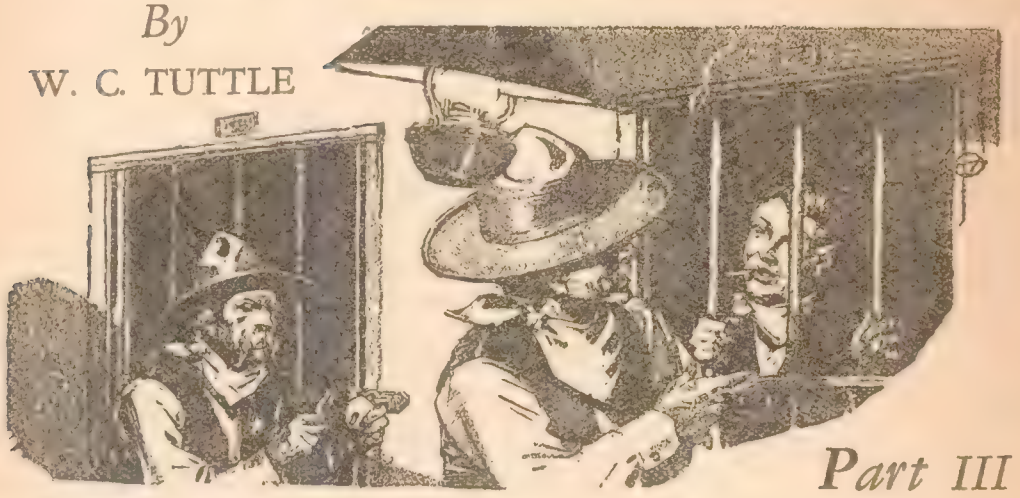
But Ben was through. A shrug of his big shoulders, and he turned and pointed to the pinnacle of the little berg. Already it had caught the first rays of the invisible sun. I surveyed the fiery finger pointing aloft, then looked at my prisoner.

"We'll be needin' our goggles today," were the words which brushed away the last of my fears.

"Let's eat," I rejoined rather irrelevantly, and turned toward the igloo.

The Ghost Riders

By W. C. TUTTLE



Part III

The Story Thus Far:

DON SHIEL was sent to prison on the false accusation of Parke Deal and Buck Halstead, Quarter Circle E riders, who swore they had caught Don and his father running their Lazy S brand on Quarter Circle E horses. Three years later, the day before his return from the penitentiary, Don's father died of the wounds he had suffered from the guns of Deal and Halstead.

Don came back to the Lazy Moon Valley to find his ranch depleted of stock by rustlers, and mortgaged for ten thousand dollars to Frank Eldon, the banker, who hated him. Old Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson, ancient cowboys and friends of his father, told Don that they didn't think his father had ever received the mortgage money.

The old punchers further informed him that **Buck Halstead had been dragged to death by** a horse a short time after his conviction; and that Parke Deal had by some mysterious agency got enough money to purchase the Bar D ranch. Don also learned that Clare, the daughter of Jim Edwards, owner of the Quarter Circle E ranch, was engaged to marry John Eldon, son of the banker. Don had been going with Clare **before his conviction for horse stealing.**

A few nights after Don's return, three mysterious riders shot down a Quarter Circle E rider and rustled twelve head of horses from the ranch. The rustlers wore long white robes; came and went like ghosts. Parke Deal openly said that he suspected Don and his two old cowboys.

The night of her wedding, Clare told her **mother that she wasn't going to marry John** Eldon. But before the assembled guests could be told, Silver Linin' Smith, the deputy **sheriff, staggered, wounded, into the ranch, with word that John had been murdered by the three white** ghosts.

Old Eldon accused Don of the crime, but Rowdy Roberts, the sheriff, refused to make an arrest on the slender evidence. Eldon then hired Sidney Byers, a detective, to shadow Don. When the cowboy heard of Eldon's move, he went to Byers and told him he would be killed if he set foot on the Lazy S range.

Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens, two wandering cowboys, heard about the ghosts terrorizing the Lazy Moon Valley and were proceeding there when Sleepy's horse was killed accidentally. After buying another wearing the Circle JB brand of a man named Jim Sherill, in the town of Roulette, they rode on. That night they took refuge from a rainstorm in the Lazy S barn. At daybreak the next morning, by **chance, they saw Don, Old Hopeful and Spud** removing the body of a dead man from the corral.

Riding up to the livery stable in town, later in the day, the boys found Silver Linin' Smith and Sheriff Roberts examining a blood stained saddle.

"It's off o' Byers's horse what jist wandered in," the sheriff explained. "It shore looks like somebody finished Eldon's detective."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy went outside and squatted on their heels against the stable. Hashknife's brow was deeply creased in thought.

"That's the same horse they loaded the body on," said Sleepy.

Hashknife nodded slowly and spoke as if to himself:

"Same horse. Byers was killed before

the storm and the horse was stabled before the storm, otherwise the blood would have been washed off."

"I'll bet the sheriff never thought of that."

"It merely establishes the fact that Byers was killed before seven o'clock last night—before the rain started. They say the three men from the Lazy S arrived here before the rain started, and didn't go back until it was over.

"Byers rode out of here a little after five o'clock, two hours ahead of the rain. They planted the body back in the hills, turned the horse loose—and there you are."

"But why was the body in the corral this mornin'?"

"Mebbe they had it in that shed and brought it out to load on the horse."

"Yessir, that's it!" snorted Sleepy. "They wasn't excited. They got him before the storm, cached the body in that shed, and went to town to see what they could find out about where Byers had said he was goin'. It would have been an awful job to dispose of the body after midnight last night; so they waited until mornin'."

Hashknife grinned.

"You've got the makin's of a detective, Sleepy. Ever once in awhile you git a brilliant idea."

"That wasn't hard to figure out."

"No, it was too blamed easy."

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that folks say Don Shiel is no fool."

"Huh! Even smart men make mistakes."

"I know. But we'll keep what we know to ourselves—for awhile."

THE following afternoon Harry Gleason and Bill Judd found the body of Sidney Byers about a mile north of the Lazy S ranch buildings. They hurried to town and notified the sheriff, who had just come back from looking for Byers in Nash. Hashknife and Sleepy were with Silver Linin'; so they all rode out to view the remains. The body had been left beside a beaten trail and in plain sight.

Byers had not been killed with a bullet, but had been struck over the head with some heavy instrument. The motive was not robbery, as he had considerable money in his pockets and a two-carat diamond ring on one finger. His gun was missing—if he carried one—and the condition of his clothing showed that he had lain out in the rain for a considerable time.

"Somebody sneaked up behind him," decided the sheriff.

"Ghosts," was the firm opinion of Silver Linin'.

"It's doubtful if anybody sneaked up on him," said Hashknife. "Why not figure that somebody, actin' friendly, knocked him out? Was Byers lookin' for any particular person?"

"You might say he was," replied Rowdy. "Anyway, he's dead."

"For once in your life, you're right," declared Silver Linin'. "And when you're right, you speak right out and say it, Rowdy."

Hashknife and Sleepy did not go back with them, but rode over to the Lazy S, where they found Hopeful and Spud working around the stable. The two old men eyed them closely, a bit distrustfully, it seemed.

"Howdy," greeted Hopeful. "Jist pokin' in or are you wishin' to see somebody?"

"Pokin'." Hashknife smiled, and turned to nod to Don Shiel, who came down from the house.

"How is everythin'?" asked Don pleasantly.

"Oh, all right. We rode back of your place with the sheriff and deputy; so we stopped here instead of goin' back to town with 'em."

"What was the sheriff doin' out here?" asked Don.

"Pickin' up the body of Byers."

"Is he dead?" asked Hopeful quickly.

Hashknife nodded and began rolling a cigaret.

"Shot?" queried Don.

"Slugged."

"Well, I'll be darned."

"More ghost stories?" asked old Spud, grinning widely.

"I reckon," replied Hashknife.

Don hitched up his belt and leaned an elbow against the fence.

"I suppose you heard that I drew a deadline against Byers."

"No, I didn't hear it," replied Hashknife, lighting his cigaret.

"Well, I did—and I meant it. Hartley, I came back here and ran up against a stone wall. Comin' back is shore hard sleddin' for a man out of the pen."

"I imagine it would be, Shiel."

"Old man Eldon thinks I killed his son. So he hired Byers to run me into a hole. I'm still out of the hole—and Byers is dead."

"Are you out of the hole, Shiel?"

Don's muscles tightened.

"Meanin' what?"

"The death of Byers don't take you out—if you ever was in."

Don laughed shortly.

"Oh, I'll get credit for killin' Byers."

"Can you prove you didn't?"

"No; but I don't believe anybody can prove I did. Eldon will try hard, but I don't believe he can do it. Why don't you boys stay and have supper with us?"

"We'd like to do that."

While old Spud and Hopeful cooked supper, Don, Hashknife and Sleepy sat together and Don told them of the things that had happened to him. He did not excuse himself from the original charge of stealing horses. He told of the mortgage, the loss of stock, their work in trying to locate the missing mortgage money.

"The sheriff told me how come you got that pardon," said Hashknife.

"That was pure luck. I wasn't tryin' to stop a break, Hartley; I was protectin' a guard who had been good to me."

"What kind of a cuss is Eldon?"

"If a starvin' dog came whimperin' to him for food it would get a boot in the ribs."

"That's my private opinion, and I've only seen him."

"Can you read character, Hartley?"

"Well, I have been fooled—"

Hashknife had been trying to read Don Shiel, but not with any great degree of success.

"How do you stand with Jim Edwards?" he asked.

Don's lips tightened for a moment.

"Jim Edwards and his outfit sent me over the road, you know. Parke Deal and Buck Halstead shot my father and their evidence sent me over."

"What became of Halstead?"

"A horse dragged him to death a month after I was convicted."

"Retribution for what he did to you."

"No, I don't suppose the horse knew a thing about it." Don laughed.

Rowdy Roberts's story of the horse stealing seemed rather weak to Hashknife. Rowdy said that Don and his father were apprehended in the act of altering the brand on a Quarter Circle E horse; but there was no evidence that they had altered such a brand. There had been no evidence at the trial which would indicate that this brand had ever been altered.

Rowdy told Hashknife that there were several Quarter Circle E horses in the corral when the two men discovered Don and his father at their little branding fire. There were no other brands in the corral. The testimony showed that there was a hot running iron in the fire, a Quarter Circle E horse thrown and tied.

Old Dan Shiel was unable to testify clearly, due to his injuries. Don swore that the evidence of Parke Deal and Buck Halstead was a mass of lies. Jim Edwards testified that he had been losing both horses and cattle and that Parke Deal had been working night and day trying to discover who was stealing the stock.

Don knew the temper of the country, knew from the faces of the jurors what was going to happen to him; so he listened to the judge's charge to the jury, halted the proceedings and confessed, exonerating his father. He admitted the charge, swore that his father had merely followed him, and unfortunately arrived there at the time Deal and Halstead discovered

them. The charge against Dan Shiel was dropped, and Don was immediately sentenced.

"I've heard the story of your trial in several different ways," said Hashknife. "I'm not tryin' to rake up any old heartaches, but was it established at that trial as to jist how you was goin' to alter that brand?"

"No one ever asked me that."

"It seems worth knowin'."

"Well—" Don smiled—"I lied plenty at that trial and got away with it; but if they asked me that question, I'd never have been able to give a satisfactory answer, Hartley."

"No, I don't think you would—" thoughtfully. "Shiel, was it a fact that there were a number of Quarter Circle E horses in that corral?"

"Seven, I think."

"And a brandin' fire burnin', with a runnin' iron in the fire?"

Don nodded quickly, and Hashknife asked the question which had been bothering him.

"Who built that fire and put in the iron?"

"I've been wonderin' about that a long, long time. Dad and I rode in on it and got off our horses. There wasn't a soul in sight. I stooped down and drew out the iron, and—and that's when the shootin' started. Dad went down. Hartley, I believe those bullets were for me. He was across the fire from me when I stooped over. I might have taken a foolish chance and shot it out with them, but I was so shocked that I—well, you know how it would be. Deal and Halstead were there, holdin' their guns on me, tellin' me what the law would do to me for misbrandin' their horses. It looked bad to them."

"Awful bad." Hashknife smiled.

"Hartley, are you a detective?" asked Don suddenly.

"Not the kind you mean. I'm interested in the things that happen. Years ago I discovered the difference between law and justice. I've got friends in high places and friends in prison. Most of my letters are sent to prisons . . ."

HOPEFUL came in and lighted the lamps and was turning back to the kitchen, when they heard the clatter of hoofs outside. Don sprang to the door, flung it open, stepped back quickly. It was Clare Edwards, hatless, wearing a black riding suit. She stood there, panting, looking at Don.

"What in the world is the matter, Clare?" he asked her. "Why did you come here?"

She tried to smile, choked over her words.

"I had to come," she panted. "Dad followed me. Mr. Eldon was out to see dad. It—it was about Byers. Eldon said he was going to swear out a warrant for you. Dad says you—you threatened Byers—you came out there to find him, and—Don, they'll arrest you for murder."

"Why, Clare, they haven't any evidence."

"Eldon says they have. He will spend every cent he has to convict you. You can't fight back. It would mean weeks and weeks in jail, even if they can't convict you. Don't you see it? Eldon and dad were at the sheriff's office as I came through. Dad tried to stop me."

"But I can't run away," protested Don. "To do that would be to admit my guilt."

"You won't have a chance to clear yourself in jail," said Hashknife. "Stayin' outside is your best chance."

"And be hunted down like a dog?"

"That's a chance."

Don turned and stepped over to Clare.

"I can't thank you now, Clare," he said. "But if the wheel ever spins my way—"

There was the scrape of a boot on the threshold, and they turned to see Jim Edwards, bulking big in the doorway, a gun in his hand. He was covering Don Shiel, but his eyes flashed to Clare, who had stepped back, a startled cry on her lips.

"Reckon I got here just in time," he said evenly. "Set down, Shiel; the sheriff ain't over a mile behind me."

Don smiled at Edwards and shook his

head.

"No, I'm not going to sit down, Jim; I'm pullin' out."

"You're not pullin' out—not by a damn sight."

"Your gun don't mean a thing to me, Jim; and you're not the kind of a man to shoot another man in the back."

Don turned deliberately and walked out through the kitchen, leaving Jim Edwards gaping after him, gun still leveled. He grunted and started ahead, but Hashknife blocked him. Edwards's dark eyes bored into the level gray ones of Hashknife for several moments, then Hashknife said evenly—

"Edwards, it seems to me that the Quarter Circle E has had its pound of flesh off this boy."

Edwards stepped back, scowling.

"Why are you buttin' in on this deal, Hartley?"

"Mebbe if we both live long enough, you'll find out."

"Yea-a-ah? Well, I—" he turned and looked toward the door.

The sheriff and deputy dismounted at the porch and came in slowly. They looked around quickly and then turned to Edwards.

"Too late, eh?" grunted Rowdy.

Edwards took a deep breath and nodded his head.

"Yeah—too late, Rowdy. He's gone."

Silver Linin' grinned at Hashknife and Sleepy as he and the sheriff walked outside, followed by Edwards. Clare came close to Hashknife.

"Thank you for what you did," she said softly.

"Well, I had a reason, ma'am."

"What reason?"

"I wanted them three ghosts to keep gallopin'."

Clare stared at him for several moments.

"You mean—" she faltered.

"If they put him in jail the ghosts would have to quit."

Her level stare was quite disconcerting, but Hashknife's eyes did not waver.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "It seems as though everybody around here thinks the same thing."

Jim Edwards stepped into the doorway.

"If you're ready, Clare, we'll go home."

And without a nod or a word she turned and followed her father.

Old Hopeful chuckled and walked to the doorway, watching the four of them ride away. He came back and grinned at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Well, we might as well have at that grub," he said.

They filed into the kitchen, where Spud was piling the food on the table. Five places had been set. Hashknife looked at Hopeful and grinned.

"You better call Shiel," he said.

Hopeful sobered quickly.

"Why—he's—"

Hashknife grinned.

"Your stable is down to the right. He turned to the left—and he never headed for the hills on foot."

"I didn't run far," said Don from the kitchen doorway. "I saw the sheriff, and he'd have seen me if I went to the stable. I'm glad you're not the sheriff of this county, Hartley."

"You could do worse." Sleepy grinned.

THE coroner's jury brought in a verdict that all the evidence pointed to the fact that Don Shiel had killed Sidney Byers, and recommended that the sheriff arrest Shiel and hold him for examination. The inquest was more or less of an open meeting, in which hearsay evidence abounded.

The sheriff told of going to arrest Don Shiel, but Don had been warned by Clare Edwards and had left for parts unknown. Curious glances were directed at Jim Edwards, who squirmed angrily. He admitted that such might have been the case.

"There is no question in my mind that Clare Edwards heard me tell her father that I was going to swear out a warrant for him," said Frank Eldon savagely. "She rode ahead and warned him. Things are coming to a pretty pass when our women favor thieves and—"

"That's where you stop talkin', Eldon," interrupted Edwards. "This started as a coroner's inquest and is ending up as an old ladies' gossiping bee."

"Are you upholding Don Shiel?" demanded Eldon heatedly.

Edwards glared at the banker and said—

"I'm upholdin' my own daughter—and don't forget it."

"She needs it!" snapped the old banker. "Why, everybody in the whole country will know what she did. If she was my daughter—"

But Edwards had him by the throat, and it required both Rowdy and Silver Linin' to force them apart.

This ended the inquest, except for the verdict.

Immediately afterward Frank Eldon went to the prosecuting attorney and offered a two thousand dollar reward for Don Shiel.

"For his conviction?" asked the attorney.

"For him in jail," snarled Eldon. "I'll get a conviction."

Sleepy met Eldon on the street a few minutes later, and the old banker attempted to vent his spleen on him, despite the fact that Sleepy was a stranger in the country.

"Why didn't you and your partner prevent Shiel from getting away last night?" demanded the banker. "You knew the sheriff was coming with a warrant."

"It's a wonder to me," drawled Sleepy lazily, "that somebody ain't shot you and sent your remains to a museum."

Eldon's face grew purple with anger, but he shut his lips and went on. Sleepy found the sheriff at his office and, after a brief greeting, said—

"Silver Linin' said you had a pair of horse clippers, and I wondered if I could borrow 'em to clip my bronc."

Rowdy gave him the clippers, and he bowlegged his way over to the stable, where he proceeded to clip the long haired Circle JB horse, which the sheriff of Lodge Pole had bought for him.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST RIDE

JIM EDWARDS rode home from the inquest in a bitter frame of mind. Ready to fight in defense of his daughter, he admitted to himself that it had been a shameful thing for Clare to do. Following close on the murder of her fiancé, she had ridden to warn the man they all believed to be the murderer.

But for her impulsive act, Don Shiel would now be in jail, and the career of the three ghosts would be over; but with Shiel at large, every further depredation of the three ghosts would reflect on her. He had revolved the thing in his mind until he was ready to explode with anger. The deed had grown to enormous proportions.

Clare and her mother were together as Edwards strode in. He stopped in the middle of the room and scowled at Clare.

"What is wrong, Jim?" asked Mrs. Edwards mildly.

"Wrong?" He flung his hat aside. "Everything is wrong. The coroner's jury advised the arrest of Don Shiel for murder—and the whole valley is either blaming Clare, or laughing at her for bein' crazy over the man who murdered John Eldon. It's a fine thing to happen to us! They say she loves Don Shiel, and who can blame them?"

"Well?" queried Clare evenly.

He turned to her, his face quivering with anger.

"Good Lord, don't you realize you have ruined your good name? Warnin' a jailbird! I nearly choked the life out of Frank Eldon for what he said about you. But he was only sayin' what the rest are thinkin'."

"Oh, Jim, it can't be as bad as that," protested Mrs. Edwards.

"Bad! It's worse!"

'I'm sorry," said Clare simply.

"Oh, you're sorry, are you? Sorry for who?"

"For Don Shiel, of course."

Jim Edwards nearly exploded. He

walked over to his hat, kicked it savagely against the door, picked it up and jerked it down on his head. And then he slammed the door behind him so hard that it shook the house.

"Oh, I don't know what to say," quavered Mrs. Edwards, on the verge of tears.

"Mother, I think dad has said enough."

"I have never seen your father so angry in his life."

Jim Edwards stepped back into the room, his lips white with anger.

"Clare, I'm goin' to talk with you right now," he said. "If you were a boy, I'd horsewhip you, but bein' as you ain't—"

"You are not going to say anything more," Clare finished his sentence for him.

"You think I ain't?" he demanded.

"If you do, you won't be talking to me," she said firmly. "If you will have one of the boys hitch up the buggy team, I will be packed by the time they are ready."

Jim Edwards' mouth sagged a little.

"What do you mean? You ain't goin' nowhere, Clare."

"Why, Clare!" protested her mother quickly.

"Yes, I am going," replied Clare evenly, to her father. "I'm not ashamed of what I did. I have as much pride as you have, dad; but mine is a pride of doing what I think is best. The gossips of Lazy Moon Valley mean nothing to me.

"They say I love Don Shiel, do they? They say I warned the man who they think murdered the man I was waiting to marry. I don't believe a word of it—and I wasn't waiting to marry John Eldon."

"You wasn't waitin' to marry John Eldon? Why, you—"

"That is true," said Mrs. Edwards wearily. "Before we had word of the murder Clare had declared that she would never marry John."

"Well, for heaven's sake!"

"I am going to pack," said Clare, and left the room.

Jim Edwards stared at his wife tensely.

"Was that true?" he asked.

"True, Jim. At the last moment she realized that she could not marry John Eldon."

"It was the return of Don Shiel that caused her to change."

"Possibly. But before Don came back John bragged about getting that mortgage on the Lazy S. He told Clare that he wanted to raise blooded stock, and as soon as his father foreclosed on the mortgage they would make their home at the old ranch."

"Damn fool!" grunted Edwards. "And then Don came back to help ruin things. Oh, it's a mess. Shiel has cooked his own goose. He made open threats against Byers—and they found Byers close to Shiel's place."

"But, Jim, we can't let Clare go."

"Can't?" grimly. "Mebbe you can stop her; I can't. What good are my arguments? I tell you, she's crazy over that damn jailbird. If I had him here, I'd—"

"What would you do?" asked a voice at the door.

Edwards whirled quickly. He had failed to close the door, and there stood Don Shiel, a smile on his lips, but his eyes as hard as agates. His holster swung at his thigh, the handle of the big Colt tilted at a handy angle. Edwards was unarmed.

"What are you doin' here, Shiel?" asked Edwards.

Don laughed shortly.

"No, you don't need to look out the window. All your men are away, except MacRae, and he's asleep in the bunkhouse. He's harmless for awhile, at least."

"Thanks to you," growled Edwards.

"You're welcome. I wanted to ask you what happened at the inquest."

"There's a warrant out for you."

"And no evidence, eh?"

"Plenty circumstantial evidence, and sometimes that will convict."

"I found that out to my sorrow."

"Eldon offers a two thousand dollar reward for you."

"Whew!" Don laughed. "Well, the old skinflint wants me badly."

Don's eyes shifted to Mrs. Edwards, and he quickly removed his hat.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Edwards; I didn't see you before."

"That is all right, Don. Oh, I'm so sorry for everything."

He smiled at her and the expression of his eyes changed.

"It *is* too bad," he agreed. "I—I wonder if I could see Clare before I go."

"No!" snapped Edwards.

"I merely wanted to thank her for what she did. I'm sorry she came. You see, it kinda makes folks think I'm hidin' behind a woman's skirts. But it was a game thing to do, and I'd like to tell her so. It might be my last chance for a long time, you know."

"Your chances are pretty slim," growled Edwards. "You'll be in jail inside of twenty-four hours."

"You've got a lot of faith in Rowdy Roberts, Jim. Personally, I don't believe I'd ever get a square deal in court. In fact, I doubt if I'd ever come up for trial, because a lot of well meanin' cattlemen would probably take the law in their own hands."

"We don't like horsethieves and murderers around here, Shiel."

Don's eyes blazed dangerously.

"Your outfit railroaded me to the pen once, Edwards; but you'll never git another chance. I haven't any money to spend for lawyers; so I'll stay out."

"We never railroaded you!"

"That's a lie. You backed Parke Deal and Buck Halstead. You sent me to prison and your hired bullets killed my old dad. I'll be waitin' for the men who come after me this time; so come and git me!"

Don whirled around quickly. Some one was riding up to the porch as he sprang outside. It was Parke Deal, riding a black gelding. There was no lost motion as the two men drew and fired.

Deal's bullet smashed into the wall just above Don's head, while Deal's horse went down in a heap, pinning Deal's left leg, and before Deal could shift to a shooting position, Don was around the house, where he mounted swiftly and spurred away into the hills.

Jim Edwards ran to a corner of the room, swept up a loaded rifle and ran to the door; but, seeing Deal's predicament, he dropped the gun and pulled the dead horse off Deal's leg. Luckily for Deal, his leg was not broken, but he cursed his luck as he limped around.

"Did you know he was here?" asked Edwards.

"I saw his horse and thought it was him. What did he want here?"

"Information on the inquest. He's shootin' mad, Parke, and he'll kill any man who tries to take him."

"He missed me."

"Don't fool yourself. He shot at the horse."

Clare had heard the shots and ran to a window in time to see Parke Deal under the horse. Her heart skipped several beats, until she realized from the conversation that Don Shiel had been there, shot the horse from under Parke and escaped uninjured.

Clare went down the stairs, passed her mother at the front door and went out on the porch, just as Teddy MacRae arrived from the bunkhouse, seeking the cause of the shooting. Deal and her father looked at her, ceasing their conversation, but she paid no attention to them as she spoke to MacRae—

"Teddy, do you feel well enough to hitch up the buggy team and take me to Del Sur?"

"Well, I shore do," replied the cowboy. "Right now?"

"As soon as you can harness the team."

Clare turned and entered the house.

"What's wrong, Jim?" asked Deal.

"Everythin' in the whole damn world. Go down and tell Ted to let you have the brown mare. I'll have the boys haul this carcass away."

And without any further word he turned and stalked into the house. Deal unsaddled the dead horse and carried his saddle down to the stable.

"Jim said for me to saddle the brown mare," he told MacRae.

"Last stall up there, Parke. What in hell happened?"

"Don Shiel was here and we swapped bullets."

Teddy chuckled softly as he fitted a bridle.

"I reckon he didn't want to kill you very bad, Parke."

"Why?"

"Picked your horse instead of you."

"Mebbe it was bad shootin'."

"Huh! I've seen him empty that .45 of his into a rollin' milk can. Mebbe he's savin' you for another time."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Deal.

Teddy laughed.

"The Lord knows he ain't got no cause to go easy with you."

"Any time I catch a horsethief—" grunted Deal, tightening his cinch.

"Your bullets finally killed his father," reminded Teddy. "And you know he swore the old man didn't have anythin' to do with it."

"The old man reached for his gun," growled Deal.

"That," said Teddy, "wasn't never proved. In fact, I'm damned if anythin' much *was* proved."

Deal led his horse out of the stall, stopping near MacRae.

"You ain't backin' this jailbird, are you, MacRae?"

"I'm backin' my own opinions."

Deal gave him a scornful look and asked—

"How many times does a man have to shoot you before you decide you ain't abused?"

"I never said he shot me."

Parke Deal laughed shortly.

"What do you think about Clare ridin' over there to warn Shiel last night?"

"Great!"

"Not accordin' to general opinions, it ain't."

"Whose damn business is it?" asked Teddy hotly. "I ain't very big and I've still got bullet holes in my ribs, but I'll pistol whip the first man I hear say a word against Clare Edwards."

Deal said nothing as he led his horse outside and rode away.

HASHKNIFE squatted on his heels and watched Sleepy clip the sorrel horse. It was a tough task, and Sleepy was obliged to desist once in awhile to rub the cramps out of his fingers and wrist. The clipping changed the appearance of the sorrel greatly.

"Looks like a racehorse." Hashknife grinned.

"Prob'ly catch cold and die of pneumonia," replied Sleepy.

Hashknife got to his feet and came in close to the animal, examining the brand closely. Hashknife had made a study of brands, and to his experienced eye there was something wrong about this one. After a close inspection he sauntered back to the sheriff's office, where he got the brand register and looked up the Circle JB. It belonged to Clint Reith, at Roulette. Hashknife asked Rowdy if he knew Reith.

"Shore I know him. Owns the Circle JB and Shamrock outfits. Also owns the saloon in Roulette. Clint used to own the Lazy Moon Saloon here, but sold out a couple years ago and went over there."

"Sleepy's sorrel is one of his brand."

"Didja buy it from Clint?"

"No, I think the man's name was Sherill."

"Jim Sherill, foreman for Clint. He used to work for the Quarter Circle E. Funny deal last night at the Lazy S, Hartley."

Hashknife smiled over his cigaret.

"I was wonderin' what Clare Edwards told Shiel," said the sheriff.

Hashknife laughed and walked to the door.

"I heard what she said. Since then I've heard it several different ways, Rowdy."

For a space of several moments neither of them spoke. The sheriff broke the silence with:

"Hartley, I never been able to figure you. Are you for Shiel or for the law?"

"Yes," replied Hashknife, and went up the street.

Silver Linin' was the first one in town to get the information about the trouble at

the Quarter Circle E that afternoon, and he was bursting with information when he found Hashknife and Sleepy in the restaurant that evening.

"Clare Edwards had a run-in with her father today, and she left home. She's over at Dave Farrell's house, sharin' a room with Edna Wales. Can you imagine that?"

"Had a run-in with her father?" queried Hashknife.

"She shore did. It was over her goin' out to warn Don Shiel. I was down there and her and Edna was cryin' on each other's shoulders. I got out of there pretty quick. Can't stand cryin'.

"Then I found Teddy MacRae, who brought Clare down here, and he told me what it was all about. But here's another thing. This afternoon Don Shiel rode in at the Edwards ranch, got off his horse and went right in the house. It's a fact.

"I dunno what was said or done in there, 'cause Teddy didn't hear. But anyway, along comes Parke Deal on his horse. You know that pretty black horse he rides, the showy one? Well, as he rode up to the house, out steps Don, and they swapped lead. Down goes Parke's horse, pinnin' Parke to the dirt while Don makes his getaway."

"Was Jim Edwards there?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, he was. I asked Teddy why Jim didn't make a break at Don, and Teddy said his opinion was that Jim wasn't wearin' his gun, 'cause when Teddy seen him he had a rifle."

"Kinda nervy of Shiel to go out there, wasn't it?" asked Sleepy.

"He'd do a thing like that."

"I hear old Eldon is offerin' two thousand for Shiel," said Hashknife.

"That's right. Oh, he wants him in jail."

"It shore looks as though he does," said Sleepy.

"Any other big news?" asked Hashknife.

"The biggest and best." Silver Linin' grinned.

"Well, go ahead and talk about it."

"My green suit showed up today."

"Had it on yet?" asked Sleepy.

"Ain't even unwrapped it yet. Rowdy's black suit is there, too. He's out at the Edwards ranch seekin' information. What for, I dunno, 'cause information don't do that road runner any good; jist clutters his achin' brain. He-e-ey! Louie! Herd me in a couple aigs and hunk of pig."

That night the boys all came in from the Quarter Circle E, for the simple reason that it was payday. Silver Linin' usually stayed sober on pay night, but this time he tried to match drinks with Chick Hatch, and by nine o'clock they were telling each other their past lives.

Jim Edwards and his wife came in to see if they couldn't induce Clare to come back home, and Chick didn't want them to see him; so he and Silver Linin' sat on the sidewalk together in a dark place.

"I feel shorry for Jim 'n' 'is wife," said Chick sorrowfully. "I'd like to help 'm in—in—indush Clare to go home."

"Thaz ri'," agreed Silver Linin' heartily. "Jim's good ol' jigger."

"Good 's gol'. Yezzir. When 'r' you and Miz Wales goin' git wed?"

"I dunno."

"Ain'tcha asked her yet?"

"Nozzir, I ain't. You shee, Chick, I been waitin' 'n' waitin' 'n' waitin'."

"What for?"

"My green suit. Hones'ly, I've waited years and years for that suit. But she's here at lasht—my goo' ol' green suit."

"Good. You put 'er on and we'll propose."

"Where'd you come in on thish, Chick?"

"Thaz ri', I don't. How'ver, I'll be besh man. Howzat? Eh? Thaz a dog-gone good idea. I'll go with you, shee? Mor'l and phys'cal shupport."

"Never heard of shush a thing in m' life. Never in m' whole life."

"You nev'r? Well, of all the igger'nce! Why, shome folks even take band with 'm. Propose to music. Fines' thing you ever shaw."

"Music. Now, thaz a idea. Do 'er up

right. But we ain't got no music."

"No-o-o-o? Use your brains a li'l. You got a git-arr, ain'tcha? An' ain't Rowdy got a bull fiddle down there in the offish?"

All of which was very true. Rowdy had aspired to a bass viol at one time, but had given it up in disgust; and Silver Linin' owned and had learned a few chords on a guitar.

"But I can't play a git-arr and propose at the shame time," protested Silver Linin'.

"'Course you can't. Play firsht. Git-tum in awful good humor."

"You go git a bottle and meet me at the offish," gurgled the deputy. "I've got to shave and dresh up."

Chick had a few more drinks at the Lazy Moon, procured a bottle and wended his erratic way back to the sheriff's office, where he stumbled in and stopped short to view Silver Linin'. There was no denying the fact that the suit was green; a pale, sickly green; what might be termed a seasick green. The pants were loose and came just below Silver Linin's knees, barely reaching the tops of his boots. The sleeves did not reach his bony wrists, and the coat was so tight across the shoulders that it fairly held the deputy's arms out from his sides.

Chick cocked one eye and looked Silver Linin' over carefully.

"They mus' 'a' made a mistake in your size, par'ner," he said.

"My shize is all right," replied the deputy owlishly. "It's the shize of the damn suit. Howd' you like the color?"

"Great! Whatcha rep'sentin', spring-time? Gawd, that thing's green! Don' gesture! M-m-m-m-m. You'll hafta git some e-lastic in there between your shoulders. Whatsa idea of them short pants? Lookin' for wet weather?"

"This suit was made t' order."

"Not for a man. Still, it don't look bad on you. Mebbe we ain't used to style."

"Tha's right. We're ol' fashioned."

"Mus' be, damn badly so. Well, have li'l drink—" uncorking the bottle. "I wish I had a new suit. I hate to go proposin' 'thout a new suit."

Silver Linin' took a deep drink and looked down at himself. Then he goggled foolishly at Chick.

"Par'ner, your cravin' is shatisfied. You wear Rowdy's new one. He won't care. Rowdy's bes' friend I ever had. Gimme anythin' he's got."

"Where's Rowdy?" cautiously.

"I think he went to Nash."

"You goin' shave?"

"Nossir. Take me or leave me, jist as I am."

"I crave black," gurgled Chick, "and I never hadda black suit."

"WOMEN!" snorted Jim Edwards. "Dave, don't ever try to tell me anythin' about women. I've been married thirty years, raised a daughter—now I give up. I can guess a bronc or a dog, but I'll admit I can't guess a woman."

Dave Farrell, the brawny blacksmith of Del Sur, chuckled in the dark as they sat together on Farrell's porch.

"You must 'a' rode Clare pretty hard, Jim."

"No! I jist told her what was what. Everybody talkin' about her goin' to warn Don Shiel; I tell you it made me mad—hurt me."

"Yeah, I know; but you've got to make allowances."

"Allowances for what?"

"Women. No, Jim, you've got to allow for 'em, 'specially in this case. I remember the time when Don was courtin' Clare, and they—"

"That damn jailbird! Steals my horses and gits sent to the pen. What kind of a daughter have I got, if you think she still cares for him. If the sheriff gits his hands on Shiel, he'll go up for life. I won't have it, I tell you."

"You don't have to, Jim—" mildly. "It 'pears to me that Clare took the bit between her teeth and ran away. Some women are cold jawed, and if you try to ride 'em with a spade bit they'll fight their head."

"And," sighed Edwards, "my wife kinda stands in with her."

"Sure. You know, Jim, I wasn't so awful sorry that Clare didn't marry John Eldon. Clare's high strung, while John always stepped on his own feet. Jist like hitchin' a thoroughbred with a plow-horse. All John had in mind was to make a lot of money. He was a lot like his father."

"Yeah, I s'pose that's right. But everythin' was all right until John told her that his father had taken a mortgage on the Lazy S. He told her it was a good deal for them, 'cause with Don in the penitentiary and the old man on his last legs, they'd have a cinch to foreclose and own the Lazy S. Clare was goin' to marry him jist to keep her promise."

"When Providence intervened."

"Providence hell! The three ghosts."

"Yeah, that's right. Let's go uptown and get a drink."

They met Rowdy at the Lazy Moon Saloon, and he drank with them. The sheriff had been to Nash, where he had had some reward notices printed, offering two thousand dollars for the arrest of Don Shiel. The name of Frank Eldon was signed to the notices.

"The prosecutin' attorney said we didn't have enough evidence for the county to offer a reward—" Rowdy grinned—"so I'm not breakin' my neck to find Don. Eldon shore is bitter against the boy, and—" Rowdy lowered his voice, speaking cautiously—"if Don is the leader of the three ghosts, old man Eldon's settin' in a hot spot."

Jim Edwards nodded thoughtfully.

"I notice the old man spends most of his time workin' at the bank since John got killed. He won't hire another bookkeeper. Some day the old man is goin' to break down. He's only a bunch of nerves right now."

"Plenty of *nerve*," grunted Rowdy. "Jim, I understand that Don was out to your place."

Edwards laughed grimly.

"He shore was, the nervy devil. Parke Deal came ridin' in and Don went out to meet him. They swapped shots, and Don dumped Parke's horse, pinnin' him to the dirt. But Deal knew Shiel was there; so it was an even break."

"It's a wonder Don didn't kill him," said Farrell.

"It's a wonder they didn't both get killed. Either one of 'em can hit a dollar at that distance. Another drink."

DOWN in the sheriff's office Silver Linin', goggle eyed from too much liquor, looked at Chick Hatch.

"You—you loo' like funeral," said Silver Linin'.

"Panz 'r' too long," replied Chick thickly. "Sleeves 'r' too long."

"Turn 'm up."

"Th' whole trouble," said Chick wisely, "is thish. You got orders mixed. They made green suit for Rowdy and black suit f'r you. Where zat bull fiddle? Oh, there you are, you li'l rashcal. C'mere to Misser Bull Fiddler. Gitcher git-arr, Misser Green."

Their start was erratic. The bass viol was of the largest variety, minus all except one string, and the wind happened to be blowing. Chick was rather indefinite of direction and insecure on his feet. They managed to tack down past the general store, but Silver Linin' spotted a group of men in front of the post office and grew cautious. He stopped Chick at the corner of the bank.

"Lizzen," he commanded. "Rowdy might be in that crowd, and he's so awful par-particular 'bout that ol' bull fiddle. We better go down thish alley and cut 'cross to the housh. Whatcha shay?"

"I shed lead kin'ly light and damned be him who firs' shez—who firs' shez—what'd he shay, Silver Linin'?"

"What's who shay?"

"The man who shed it."

"What man? Be ex-explichit."

"Be who?"

"You're drunk'r 'n' hunner dollars."

"Hurrah!"

"F'r what?"

"I been wonnerin' wha's matter with

me. Go 'head."

They went down the dark alley toward the rear of the bank. It was all open country beyond the rear of the bank, except for a long, low shed, which a store used as a sort of warehouse. There were a number of empty boxes and barrels strewn around, and as they staggered out of the alley, Chick, with that precious bass viol clasped to his breast, stumbled over a box and went headlong.

He came down with a crash, and Silver Linin', trying to avoid disaster, caught his heel against Chick and fell backward, landing square in the middle of the bass viol, which ceased its musical existence with one glorious *tung!* and a splintering of fragile wood.

"Yee-e-e-e—o-o-ow!" yelled Silver Linin'.

And almost at the same moment there came the drumming of hoofs, as three white clad riders nearly crashed into the prostrate men; the red flashes of a revolver—flashes which seemed to dart straight at the two men; the thudding reports of the shots . . .

Silver Linin' went over backward into Chick, reaching for a gun he did not have. Chick was cursing fluently. A grounded bullet had filled his eyes with gravel. Silver Linin's clutching hand fastened around the neck of his guitar and he staggered to his feet.

A figure, partly dressed in white, was stumbling toward them, and with a gurgling yelp Silver Linin' swung up his guitar and brought it down with every ounce of his strength on the head of this half ghost. The person went down in a heap, and Silver Linin', overbalanced from the force of his blow, and with only the neck of his beloved guitar in his two hands, turned a complete somersault and landed in a sitting position.

Men were running down the alley, others circling the bank from the other side. Some one fell over Chick and got cursed wearily. Chick's clothes were so black that they were not visible. A man came running from the rear of a store, carrying a lantern.

It seemed to Silver Linin' that everybody in Del Sur was there. Hashknife helped him to his feet, while others were trying to get the remains of that guitar from around the neck and shoulders of a man who apparently had a white pillow cover over his head.

Every one was asking questions, but no one seemed to be able to answer them. Chick was on his feet now. They managed to splinter the guitar enough to remove it and under the white covering they found old Frank Eldon. His face was almost as white as the covering they had removed, except where the guitar had scratched him.

He tried to talk to them, but no sounds came. He blinked like an old owl in the light, soundless for many moments; but when the words came they came with a rush.

"Robbed—the bank," he panted. "Three ghosts. They tried to steal me. I don't know what happened. He let loose of me and the horses were running. One knocked me down, and I—I heard shots. I got up and tried to find some one, and I got knocked down again."

"How much did they git?" asked the practical Rowdy.

"About twelve thousand dollars. Why don't you do something? Standing here while they get away—"

The men turned to Silver Linin' and Chick. The lantern light had showed them the smashed instruments. Rowdy kicked aside the remains of his bass viol and made a close examination of Chick's ill fitting suit.

"What do you know, Chick?" asked Rowdy.

"I dunno nothin'," replied Chick.

"You never did. How about you, Silver Linin'?"

"I sheen three ghos' on horshback," replied Silver Linin' bravely. "They rode right over me, all of 'em shootin' at us. I reached for my gun and they high-tailed it out of shight. Then I got up on m' feet, and I shed, 'C'mon, all the rest of you.' And there was another one; so I

bent my git-arr over his head—and that's all my tale, lads."

"Was there four?" queried Eldon weakly.

"What in hell was you paradin' around in white for?" asked the deputy.

"He—he put it on me. He forced me to come from the bank with him, and then I—I seen his two companions. Then he said he guessed he'd take me along, and —and he put that thing over my head."

"Didja hear him say anythin' to his men?" asked Hashknife.

"I heard him say, 'Come on boys, it's time to fade out.' "

They all went into the bank, where the banker sank wearily into a chair. The big safe was open. Eldon was unnerved, shaky, but he told them what happened.

"I've been working nights since John was killed. The work had to be kept up. I always came in the back door, locking it behind me. As I stepped outside tonight I nearly crashed into a white clad man, who shoved a gun against me and warned me to make no noise. Then he forced me to back up into the bank, and at the same time he spoke over his shoulder, and I believe he said, 'All right, boys; keep your eyes open.'

"He forced me to light a lamp while he crouched behind the counter out of sight. Then he told me to open the safe or he would kill me. I opened it, and he forced me to bring him the money. I—I brought him twelve thousand. It wasn't all, but I—I took a chance.

"He asked me how much it was, and I said it was twelve thousand. Then he said, 'All right; that makes us even. Blow out the lamp.' He forced me to go out ahead of him, and he took me out close to where his other two men were, holding his horse. Then he said, 'I believe I'll take you along with us,' and he put that thing over my head. I've told you what happened after that."

"He said, 'That makes us even,' did he?" queried Hashknife.

"Those were his exact words. Now, will some of you make an effort to recover my money?"

"I'll take him home," said Edwards softly, realizing that the old man was on the verge of collapse; and the rest of them filed out.

"Frank," said Edwards, "was it Don Shiel?"

"Just as sure as I'm alive, Jim. He admitted it when he said, 'That makes us even.' He meant that mortgage, damn him! I wonder what he meant to do with me?"

Edwards shook his head, went over and closed the safe, spinning the combination.

"There's nothin' you can do, Frank; let's go up to your house."

The old man dumbly followed him out, and Edwards locked the door behind them. As they were crossing the street they met Parke Deal, and he walked up with them. He had just ridden in from Nash and heard the news.

"I just saw Rowdy and his valuable deputy down at the office," he told them. "They're not doin' a thing except talkin' —talkin' about a black suit of clothes and a busted bull fiddle."

"That's probably of more interest than my money," said Eldon. "I hope this will convince the county that they should offer a reward and make an effort to catch Don Shiel."

"Are you sure it was Shiel?" asked Parke Deal anxiously.

"No question about it. Don't I know his voice? Didn't he just the same as admit who he was?"

"How do you mean?" asked Deal.

"When he asked me how much money I gave him, and he said that it made us even now."

"I guess that settles it." Edwards nodded. "I think we've let that outfit go too far already."

"Most people in the valley will agree with that," said Deal dryly.

Down at the sheriff's office they were trying to figure out some sort of move. Rowdy seemed to look to Hashknife for an idea, but the tall cowboy advised him to wait for morning.

"What's got me whipped is the idea of 'em kidnapin' Eldon," said Rowdy.

"That don't make sense to me."

Hashknife grinned slowly.

"What are you thinkin' about?" asked Rowdy, noticing the grin.

"Oh, jist a sudden idea that tickled me, Rowdy."

"A reason for the kidnapin'?"

"Far fetched, but reasonable."

"Uh-huh. Well, there's two murders; so I don't reckon they'd hesitate to wring Eldon's neck. Wasn't it lucky that Silver Linin' and Chick Hatch happened along when they did? Mebbe saved the old man."

Jim Edwards went down to Farrell's home, where Farrell had already told them what had happened. Edwards wanted Clare to go home with him, but he knew there was no arguing with her.

"This case cinches Don Shiel," he told them. "The man was fool enough to admit who he was to Eldon, and if it hadn't been for Chick and Silver Linin', they probably would have killed the old man. If we've got any law in this valley they'll have old Hopeful and Spud in jail tomorrow mornin', and they'll smoke Don out of the hills."

CHAPTER VI

EVIDENCE

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy were out early next morning, but the stableman said that the sheriff and deputy had already left town. Hashknife took the trouble to search the ground behind the bank for tracks of the "ghost" horses. There were no other horse tracks to confuse his search, and he was able to study several distinct marks.

There was one set of shoes different from the rest, the mark of a small shoe, the heel points very close together. He questioned the blacksmith about it, but he did not remember fitting a shoe of that description. Many of the ranchers did their own shoeing.

They rode out of town, heading for the Lazy S. About halfway to the ranch, just off the road, was an old frame shack. Hashknife led the way over to it and dismounted. The top, sides and one end were still in fair shape, but the front end had fallen down. The building was about twenty feet long.

Searching the dirt floor near the rear, where the rain had not washed too heavily, he found the marks of that same peculiar shoe.

"Been ghosts here too, Sleepy," he said, but Sleepy was grunting over a discovery of his own.

It was a Colt revolver, slightly rusty, fully loaded, and on the handle was the monogram: S. J. B. Hashknife smiled slowly as he examined the gun.

"Byers's gun, Sleepy. Byers was killed in here—by ghosts."

"What in hell was he doin' in here?"

"That doesn't matter much."

They walked back to the front, Hashknife shoving the gun inside his shirt. Their horses had moved inside the building, and as they started to lead them out, Hashknife stopped suddenly. A man had ridden past the rear of the building, humped low in the saddle, edging along some brush which extended out to the road.

"That's Don Shiel!" whispered Sleepy.

Coming down the road were four men—Rowdy Roberts, Silver Linin', Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson. The two old cowboys were handcuffed, riding together between the sheriff and deputy.

As they came past the edge of the brush Don spurred out, covering the sheriff and deputy with his gun. The four horses, startled, milled around, but the officers' arms were in the air.

Hashknife and Sleepy were not close enough to hear what was said, but the pantomime showed that Don objected strenuously to Hopeful and Spud being captives. The sheriff dismounted and came over to Hopeful. It was evident that he was about to oblige Don and unlock the handcuffs, when the hills suddenly echoed from the sound of a shot, and Don Shiel pitched sidewise off his horse, which ran a few steps, whirled around and stopped.

TO BE CONCLUDED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

HAROLD LAMB, whose stories of the Cossacks have long been favorites with our readers, sends in the following footnote to his current travels:

At sea, between the
Crimea and Batum

Various times in the past I've touched in stories upon the Stone Babas. They are the life-size stone figures, more often women than men, planted in the earth on top of a mound in the steppes. Three curious things about them: 1. They are found in the most barren places, and never close together. 2. They belong to no familiar type of figure, and they extend from western Ukraina across the plains of mid-Asia into Mongolia proper. 3. They always face *east*.

They are evidently at least seven centuries old; but they are not Mongolian or Chinese work; they are certainly not Persian. All of them have their hands crossed over their middles, and are holding some kind of a box. As I remember it, the Cossacks used to steer clear of the Baba mounds with their plows, and the Kirghiz sometimes dressed the Babas in women's garments, while some of the Siberian tribes worshipped them as gods. It was really quite a mystery, these lonely stone women scattered across the thousands of miles of mid-Asia. Various explanations were offered: 1. That they were a kind of milepost, left to mark some forgotten roads; 2. That they were grave monuments, erected on the sites of battles—hence the mounds, and the distance apart; 3. That they were the gods of an unidentified, migratory people.

I SAW several of the Stone Babas a few days ago in the Historical Museum at Odessa, and learned for the first time from Professor Seminoff of the Museum that the Russian archæologists had worked out an interesting explanation of the Babas.

They say the stone women were erected by the Polovtsi (Russian term for Kumanians), called Betchen-Aks by the Turkish writers. They were a Turkish people who migrated from the Baikul region of Mongolia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They placed the stone figures on the graves of chieftains or important men, the figures being supposed to represent the spirits of the enemies slain by the occupant of the grave, and to protect his burial place.

This accounts for the mounds, and the strange placing of the figures. I suppose they were faced east, toward the homeland of the Polovtsi. It sounds reasonable.

I'm just starting for Tiflis and the Caucasus. After that Persia. —HAROLD LAMB

A NOTE of rebuttal from Comrade Herbert W. McBride, whose criticism of machine gun data in Stephen Allen Reynolds' story, "An Errand To The Barrens" (June 1st issue), together with a reply from the author, appeared recently in these columns:

Indianapolis, Indiana

The receipt of your long and painstaking letter this morning greatly deepens my regret at having ever written the criticism. Don't know what is the matter with me: after resisting, for years, the impulse to "bawl out" many of the really serious errors which I have noted in the products of other writers, why in hell did I think it necessary to call attention to a few inconsequential matters in your story, which I read to the end—and really enjoyed it?

Now, by rights, I should quit, but I fear that such action might be misconstrued as admitting that I was wrong about some of the points which I criticized; and I can not, conscientiously, allow any such misunderstanding. Everything I wrote was, literally, exact and true, despite the testimony which you have been so kind as to contribute. My experience with firearms has been intimate and mostly of a professional nature for fifty years, during which time I have had a hand in the development of many of the types now in use—including machine guns and, particularly, the .45 caliber Colt automatic pistol; having used one of them since a date before they were formally adopted as the official side-arm of the U.S. Army. During the war I was a member of a Canadian Machine Gun Section during the first two and a half years of the fighting and later commanded a battalion of machine guns in the United States Army.

YOUR extracts from official data are not news to me—in fact I had some small part in developing them and all that and a library of similar statistics are now within my reach, and I think I may safely rest my case against the sub-machine gun on the figures which you quote, showing that the dispersion is so great that but some 74 per cent of the shots can be kept on a 4x6 target at a range of 100 yards. That could hardly be called the work of a "weapon of precision," could it? As a matter of fact, Colonel Thompson himself never claimed that for it.

Now, theoretically, the dispersion should be but five times as great at 500 yards as at 100—IF, and it's a big if—the velocity continued the same throughout the range and there were no atmospheric conditions which might interfere. But as a matter of cold fact, owing to the rapid decrease in velocity and the consequent increase in the effect of air currents and what not, the actual dispersion would be several times the theoretical twenty feet.

As to the extreme range—well, yes, that is just about the same as that of the ordinary .22 long rifle cartridge, and either bullet *might* cause injury, possibly death, to a person hit by it at that range, but as to penetration, I have shot plenty of those same bullets through various parts of automobiles at short range but you just try it some time on any kind of planking such as might be used in a fishing schooner similar to the *Quickstep*. You'll be surprised.

IT SEEMS almost silly to make any reply to the statement of the deputy-sheriff that he could "smash the parking lights out of a car at 600 yards" with a Tommy-gun. This man is certainly even more ignorant than the usual run of deputy-sheriffs (and that is very hard to believe), or he is simply spoofing you. The barrel of the .45 caliber automatic pistol, Model 1911, (standard U.S. Army pistol), is not over five inches in length and the hammer *is* a hammer—not a "cocking piece".

The reason I mentioned Crossman was because he is probably the best informed man in the United States on such matters as we have been discussing. Not only in theory, but by actual experimenting and demonstrating, both in the Army and out of it, he has become one of the foremost (I think the foremost) authority on ballistics, both interior and exterior, in this country. As a member of many experimental "boards" while an ordnance officer in the Army, he did much to debunk a lot of the prevalent ideas as to extreme ranges, trajectories and dispersions which prior to his time had been tabulated and circulated simply from calculations worked out in the laboratory and office.

Oh, what's the use? I know my ballistics and you know your story writing, so please go ahead and write some more. I will not quarrel about anything you say—not even if you mention "steel-jacketed bullets". There *have* been some such—in Europe. —HERBERT W. MCBRIDE

ONE of you recently requested information concerning the episode of Sitting Bull and the R.N.W.M.P. on the Canadian border. The editor of the *Canadian Police Gazette* sends in a copy of the September issue of his magazine, containing an article answering the query. The article is by Inspector Parsons of the British Columbia police, and the following is a quotation therefrom. The Steele referred to was Colonel Sam Steele who was an outstanding member of the Royal Mounted for many years.

" . . . Steele had again proved his worth when the Indian chief, Sitting Bull, had fled across the Canadian border with two thousand armed and well mounted braves, after the Custer massacre in the United States. Steele, clad in his scarlet jacket, and accompanied by only one trooper and an Indian interpreter, had ridden out from his North-West Mounted Police post and had arrested Sitting Bull in the midst of his scowling warriors. Later he had persuaded the chief and his followers to surrender to the United States forces on the border.

"Two regiments of American cavalry waited at the frontier to take over the rebel tribe, and

when Steele turned up with his one trooper, the Americans asked, in astonishment, where his escort was. That night Steele was the guest at dinner of the American officers; they did their best to drink him under the table, but the hardy old frontiersman withstood their best efforts."

AND herewith correspondence between two of Ask Adventure staff on the kind of arms and ammunition carried by Custer and his men:

Sisters, Oregon

I would like to hear from Comrade Wiggins something concerning the letter from E. G. Rogers in the August 1st Camp-fire. I am under the impression that Custer's men carried the .45-70 Springfield carbine, center-fire brass shells. Carried in the web cartridge belts in use at that time, the brass cartridges corroded badly if the belts became at all damp. I had one of these belts—have it yet—and used to grease the cartridges before placing them in the belt.

Brass cartridges, center-fire, were in rather common use in the seventies, the '73 and '76 Winchester, and the Ballard and Sharps rifles of that date, as well as others, using them; also the .44 and .45 Colt revolvers.

Digging into Custer records, in Godfrey's letters to his wife I find repeated allusions to his staghounds and greyhounds catching antelope; and Godfrey relates that once when the hounds were after an antelope, Lieutenant Hare, on horseback, overtook the hounds, passed them, and killed the antelope with his revolver.

—WILLIAM WELLS

Mr. Wiggins's reply:

Salem, Oregon

While I know that Custer's men had the .45-70 Springfield carbine, I am not positive what type of ammunition was issue stuff then. I have seen and handled in rifle size, and fired in the .45 revolver size, copper cased cartridges with inside primers that looked like rim-fires, and which had the priming held in place in the center of the head by a metal ring. This ring, was held by a couple of indentations just in front of the rim, possibly about ⅛ inch ahead of it.

The revolver loads I fired were made and packed in 1878, two years after the Custer fight; I was given the rifle shell, and never saw its box, but believe it to have been issue stuff, as I started training in college cadet corps with the old .50 Springfield and this type of cartridge.

While I can't tell accurately, I believe the copper cased cartridge was standard issue to troops, and the brass cases were strictly commercial stuff. You know the Ordnance Department was moribund about 1900, and was woefully behind private arms makers in quality and progressiveness.

—DONEGAN WIGGINS

A BIT from William Edward Hayes, in connection with his story, "White River Bridge," in this issue:

Hayfield, Virginia

There is such a bridge as described in my story, and it's located in one of Indiana's big railroad terminals. While mostly fiction, this story nevertheless is based upon a series of incidents which happened in three different railroad yards during the flood disasters which followed that leaden Easter Sunday of 1913 when such cities as Indianapolis and Dayton, Ohio, experienced millions of dollars in damages.

The reader will note that reference is made to the twelve-hour shifts in the yards. In 1913 the eight-hour day, which now is universal for switchmen and clerks, had not yet come into effect.

The loading of the steel bridge with a coal train was actually resorted to during the 1913 flood, and the bridge was saved. It happened that I was, at the time, a switchman on duty in the terminal where this took place.

—WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Old Songs

STEAMBOAT BILL and Casey Jones.

Request:—"Was there ever a Steamboat Bill? A Casey Jones?"

—D. O. NICHOLS, JR., Birmingham, Alabama

Reply, by Mr. Robert W. Gordon:—The author of "Steamboat Bill" told me himself some years ago that this character was entirely imaginary and that he had in mind no particular boat and no particular pilot.

Casey Jones was a genuine engineer who was killed in a wreck on the Illinois-Central Railroad about 1900.

Army

MINIATURE medals for evening dress.

Request:—"1. Is it regulation to wear medals received while in the service of another country, English or French, on the American uniform?

2. Is it regulation to wear miniature medals on the uniform?"

—JAMES F. LOGSDON, Berkeley, California

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—1. Yes.

2. Evening dress only.

Papua

WHAT to wear in the capital.

Request:—"What sort of clothing would I be likely to need for a sojourn in Port Moresby, Papua?" —H. HOISINGTON, Detroit, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. L. P. B. Armit:—Clothing is light, mostly cotton articles, and a pith helmet or other adequate head covering is a necessity. Climate is so hot that the regular dress is a light cotton singlet, shirt, pants, shoes and socks, helmet or topee; coats are only worn when visiting—formal visits. Natural wool singlets are better than cotton, as the wool absorbs perspiration and keeps body warm; but all clothing must be light and easily laundered.

Baseball

KNOTTY points for the amateur batsman.

Request:—"I have a few questions about baseball rules:

1. Two men out and runner on third base. Catcher drops third strike. Is the batter out, or must the play at first be made?

2. None out. Runner on first. Batter hits infield fly. Is the batter out automatically?

3. I wish also you would in general clear up the rule concerning dropped third strike."

—BOB MILLS, Helena, Montana

Reply, by Mr. Frederick G. Lieb:—1. Catcher must throw the batsman out at first base.

2. No, batsman is not automatically out. Fly ball must be caught.

3. If a catcher drops a third strike and first base is unoccupied, batsman becomes a base-runner under all conditions. In the event first base is occupied, he is automatically out with none or one out. With two out, he must be retired at first base.

The Marines' Hymn

"FROM the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli. . ."

Request:—"Would you please be kind enough to send me the words for the Marine song, 'The Halls of Montezuma'."

—VICTOR ENGLANDER, New York City

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—Herewith are the words of "The Halls of Montezuma", known officially as "The Marines' Hymn":

From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli
We fight our country's battles on the land as on the sea—
First to fight for right or freedom, and to keep our glory clean,
We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine.

Our flag unfurled to every breeze, from dawn to setting sun,
We have fought in every clime and place where we could take a gun—
In the snow of far off northern lands and in sunny tropic scenes,
You will find us always on the job—the United States Marines.

Here's health to you and to our Corps, which we are proud to serve!
In many a strife we've fought for life, and never lost our nerve.
If the Army and the Navy ever look on heavens scenes,
They will find the streets are guarded by United States Marines!

Sloop

WHERE to step the mast.

Request:—"I am seeking information regarding a 16-foot centerboard flat bottom sloop, having a 5-foot-3-inch beam.

1. How far from the bow should the mast be and length of mast?

2. What type of sail is best to use in a shallow rock-infested inland bay, marconi or boom and gaff rigged, and the dimensions of mainsail and jib?"

—EARL M. WILSON, Kingsville, Texas

Reply, by Mr. Arthur R. Knauer:—1. On a sloop of this size the mast might be anywhere from one-quarter to one-third the length of the boat from the bow. Why not have it cat-rig?

2. A marconi rig would be the simplest. 125′ to 150′ should be about right for your total sail area; about 75% in the mainsail would be about right.

Hopi Dance

A PRAYER for rain that brought a blizzard.

Request:—"Are the Indians of the Southwest sincere in their religious dances, or are the dances nowadays performed merely to attract tourists?"

—HENRY W. VOLZ, Phoenix, Arizona

Reply, by Mr. H. F. Robinson:—There is no question but what the Indians are sincere in the use of their ceremonial dances. The Indians have many deities. They recognize their own tribal gods—they also believe that other tribes may have powerful gods who under certain circumstances might help them. Therefore they are not averse to asking for blessings from *any* god they believe will help them.

The fact that an enemy has a god whom they believe has helped this enemy would be no reason why such a powerful god might not help them; so why not ask him for aid?

Last Summer the Zuni Indians went over to the Hopi country and joined in their dances that they, the Zunis, might benefit. They wanted rain—but something must have gone wrong, because they had the heaviest snows last Winter that had occurred in generations and lost much stock, so the wise men of the Zunis said it was from asking foreign gods for help, and as the foreign gods did not know just what they needed, they sent their help in the wrong way.

There are very few religious dances put on for the amusement of the tourist. Why should they? The Indians get nothing for doing it!

Jaguar

CENTRAL AMERICA'S most formidable beast. Some pointers on aiming at him.

Request:—"I would like to get some information on the Central American jaguar.

How does he compare with our panther or mountain lion in aggressiveness, vitality, etc? Will they attack a man, and just about how much lead can one of those cats carry if he got right mad and anxious to get at a fellow? Don't you think that a good cool shot with a .32-20 high-speed would be a good match for a jaguar, or do you think it would take more gun than that?"

—W. B. WINSTON, Shreveport, Louisiana

Reply, by Mr. E. Bruguiere:—You ask me a difficult question because no matter what I tell you, there will be a large number of people who will contradict me. The jaguar-puma-panther debate compares with that controversy over the ferocity of the shark: The investigators who gather the best proof frequently do not live to present their evidence.

Throughout Central America the jaguar is referred to as the *tigre*, which in Spanish means tiger (*Felis tigris*). There are, however, no tigers in the Western Hemisphere.

As to the comparative aggressiveness of the jaguar, the panther and the mountain lion, I don't feel the least doubt, though others may. Of these I think the panther least ferocious. Panther has been very loosely used by hunters to designate almost any mountain cat; the panther is, however, a leopard (*Felis pardus*) and the smallest and most timid of the three. The mountain lion, which is the same thing as a cougar or puma, and which is frequently misnamed a panther, or catamount, is more aggressive than the panther and both stronger and more enduring. Ordinarily the mountain lion will attack a man only when it is hungry, cornered, or with young. The jaguar, on the other hand, is frequently ready to take the initiative in a fight with a man and it is easily the most vicious and ferocious predatory animal on the American continents. They have been known to come into villages, even into houses, looking for trouble. This is unusual, for ordinarily they can find all the food they want without taking this risk.

The natives in Central America fear the jaguar most when they are on the trail at night, either afoot or on horseback. If you give one of them a flashlight to light the way he will usually have the beam casting among the branches overhanging the trail, even at the cost of many stumbles and falls. Any guide will tell you that a jaguar is not to be monkeyed with. "A good cool shot with a .32-20?" The gun is all right, but at close range the question is whether the man is good enough—and cool enough. I should not suggest using pointed, jacketed bullets. In high power rifles they attain a velocity that, if they

do not hit a bone, drives them through a flesh hole as clean as a whistle with about as much effect as a whistle.

HOW much lead a jaguar can "carry" I have no idea. If it is in the shoulder, heart, spine or head above or between the eyes, they just don't carry at all. But a jaguar can do a lot of damage on three legs, or with a bullet through the muscle of the neck. The best shot is for the shoulder, aiming at the center of the vital portion. If the animal is facing you head on, shoot for the brain if you can't get a shot at the shoulder. In this case it is best to shoot high on the head, because when a jaguar charges its head is thrust slightly down and forward. This, though it may look strange in print, puts the beast's eyes almost on a level with the underside of its belly. Hence, if in a charge you aimed at the spot between the eyes you would be allowed about three inches drop-off to get a minor wound through the snout. If aim is taken at almost the top of the skull a reasonably safe undershooting margin of safety is had. At the same time you have a fairly long strip of neck and shoulder above your sights; the higher your head is than the jaguar's, the longer the visible strip. This is necessary because the tendency in a tight spot is invariably to shoot high. This is because in the excitement or tension of the moment the cheek is not nestled down on the stock snugly and the tendency is to sight high over or ignore the rear sight, thereby giving the rifle a slight cant. You may ask me who is going to stop to think of all that with a jaguar after him. The idea is to get it all thought out first; when you go jaguar hunting—just do it.

Secret Service

OPERATIVES must be physically fit. Please note that there are no openings at present.

Request:—"I would appreciate the following information concerning Federal Secret Service: Qualifications; methods of securing employment; duties, possibilities of travel, salary."

—W. E. BRISTOL, Langley Field, Virginia

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—An applicant for position of operative, Secret Service, U. S. Treasury Department, must show that he has completed a full common school education or equivalent, and has had at least one year of continuous and recent experience in responsible investigative work. Experience acquired more than five years previous to application not acceptable. Must be over 21 and under 40, in sound health and able to pass physical exam. Vision must be at least 20/30 combined, with at least 20/40 in weaker eye, without glasses. Hearing must be at least 15 feet, each ear, for ordinary conversation. Hernia or organic heart disease, or other serious physical disability will disqualify. Entrance pay from $2300 to $2600 a year, depending on qualifications as shown by examinations and duty to which assigned. Duties cover a wide range of investigative work. This, of course, means that you may be sent any place where detective work is needed.

Positions can only be filled by Civil Service examination. I am sorry to say that you have no opportunity at the present time.

Trapper

SCOUT in the Autumn over your Winter domain.

Request:—"I would like to know the conditions in Canada for a trapper, and what part of your territory is best for trapping and hunting."

—ORONZO FIZZAROTTI, New York City

Reply, by Mr. William MacMillan:—Frankly, never have conditions been so unfavorable. Prices paid for raw furs are so low just now that not one trapper in ten can make any kind of a living out of it.

The most prolific trapping grounds around this section of the country are in the Lake St. John district and along the north shore of the St. Lawrence, to the Gulf, where mink, beaver, marten, lynx, fox, fisher, weasel and muskrat are to be had.

Your best plan would be to scout over the country in the early Autumn so that you would know your terrain when covered with snow.

A nonresident would be required to take out a hunting license costing $25. Then he should have enough cash, say $300, with which to purchase a canoe, equipment and provisions.

The Winters are long, November to April, and tough. Since there are no duties on raw skins going into the United States you should be able to get the top price for your catch in the U. S.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelop and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

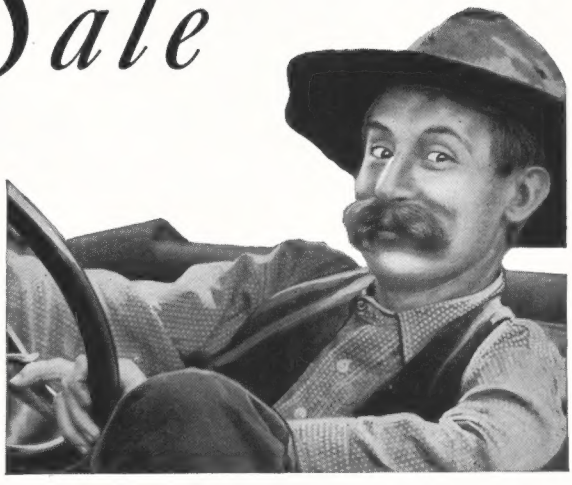
Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

"Chic" Sale

tells why

Kiddies don't mind giving up Their Nickels



WELL sir there ain't anything in the world that's perfect. I'm a carpenter by trade. I've examined a board fer knot holes only to git it in place and have a windshake crop out. Of course some things are perfecter than others, but fer instance you take even these little chocolate tablets. They taste good, and they work easy but conscientious, and they ain't habit-formin'—but they've got jest two flaws.

One flaw is a mother can't make the children behave by sayin', "I'll give you a dose of medicine if you don't watch out." She has got to find some other threat because the children like these little tablets. The other flaw is from the young 'uns' viewpoint. They enjoy their medicine so much they don't git any nickel fer takin' it. I thank you.

"Chic" Sale

Those "little chocolate tablets"—Ex-Lax—have changed *medicine* time to *candy* time for millions of kiddies.

No more nasty medicines! No more bribes! They don't get any nickel for taking Ex-Lax—but the little fellows are more than willing to sacrifice the money for the sake of those delicious little chocolate tablets.

You can't do anything that will mean more to your children than teach them to keep "regular." And keeping "regular" means having at least one thorough bowel movement every day. Ex-Lax will keep them "regular."

And as delightful as Ex-Lax is for kiddies, it's just as effective for grown-ups. There's no better laxative and none that employs a safer principle.

Gentle and effective—not habit-forming—Ex-Lax is the ideal laxative. At all druggists. 10c, 25c, 50c.

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